

LEOPOLD METHOD

INTELLIGENT, INSIGHTFUL FOOTBALL ANALYSIS



‘The football landscape in Australia is changing and for the better. Never has there been more in-depth discussion and analysis about this great game, and at the forefront has been *Leopold Method*. The team at *Leopold Method* has delivered some of the best analysis of A-League and Socceroos matches consistently since its creation. Not to mention delving into some of Australian football’s forgotten history. I can’t speak highly enough of the people who work tirelessly at *Leopold Method*. They’re a credit to themselves and football in this country.’

**Mark Rudan, Fox Sports football analyst, Sydney United 58
coach and former professional player**

‘*Leopold Method* is an extraordinary avenue for quality football journalism. It provides something that appeals to the broader base of football followers covering many aspects of the sport from in-depth analysis of games to wonderfully written opinion pieces and historical features. I have been a football writer for 42 years, working for the *Daily Telegraph* (Sydney), the *Sydney Morning Herald* and now *The Australian*, where I have been the chief football writer for over 25 years. In that time I have never come across the like of *Leopold Method*. I have no hesitation in recommending them.’

Ray Gatt, Chief football writer, The Australian

‘Australian sport is awash with those covering it seemingly in minute detail. But rarely does the mainstream allow itself the time or inclination to step back and ask why and show how. *Leopold Method* does that, and more. It’s a breath of fresh air for Australian sport, let alone football.’

John Stensholt, Journalist, Australian Financial Review

‘A cultured Australian footballer known as “The Little Professor”, Leo Baumgartner, is the eponymous inspiration for *Leopold Method*. It’s appropriate. *Leopold Method* not only lives up to its tag line of “intelligent, insightful analysis”, but I would add another – “independent”. Even if the reader doesn’t agree with the analysis presented – and diversity of opinion is part of the DNA of football – *Leopold Method* is a “must read” publication that adds significant value to the Australian football media. Long may it continue.’

**Bonita Mersiades, Guardian Australia, My Football Today
director and advisor to Northern Fury FC**

‘I arrived in Australia at the start of 2013 to set up the sport desk of the Australian branch of the *Guardian* newspaper. As a brand we pride ourselves on our football coverage and I was looking for writers and analysts who could carry on that tradition in Australia. The website that stood out for me was *Leopold Method*: it contained strong analysis with respect for the history of football in Australia. It’s where I found Joe Gorman and Kate Cohen, two of the best young football writers in Australia.’

Tom Lutz, Sport Editor, Guardian Australia

‘It has been great to witness the development of the game both on and off the park, particularly over the past decade. We’ve always had talented people in all facets of the game doing great things but unfortunately, more often than not, this went unnoticed. With the explosion of social media and sites such as *Leopold Method*, the platform is well and truly here to assist in improving the knowledge base within our football community. The analysis and insight provided by the crew at *Leopold Method* is top class and continues to make an outstanding contribution to the growth of our great game. The likes of Kate Cohen, Joe Gorman and Shaun Mooney demonstrate a tactically astute and high level understanding of the complexities of the game. Everyone can see what’s happening on the field, *Leopold Method* explains in great detail why.’

**Alistair Edwards, Football analyst, AFC Technical Study Group
panel member and former Socceroo**

‘*Leopold Method* has established itself as an authoritative reference across the breadth of Australian football matters. The content is a function of talented and professional journalists who value thorough research and evidence-based analysis. In *Leopold Method*, we have a resource that has identified the core elements of Australian football’s DNA, thereby enabling it to make an outstanding contribution to the journey and evolution of our game in this new era.’

**Kimon Taliadoros, ABC Radio football commentator
and former Socceroo**

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*In memory of Nathan 'Nato' Berthaly,
1976-2015*

EDITORIAL

THIS EDITION OF *LEOPOLD METHOD* IS ABOUT THE FUTURE. After almost 10 seasons of the A-League and three consecutive World Cup appearances, football in Australia is now in a healthier state than ever. It's a good place to be. Over the past several months Asia has catapulted into the football conversation. The Western Sydney Wanderers won the Asian Champions League in October 2014, while Australia hosted the Asian Cup for the first time in January 2015. Melbourne Victory's W-League side travelled to Japan for the Women's Club World Cup. Accordingly, much of this edition focuses on Asia.

Long before the Wanderers became the first Australian side to win the Asian Champions League, however, St. George Budapest participated in the Tokyo International Tournament in 1971. The team, which is the cover image of this edition, included Johnny Warren, Manfred Schaefer, Doug Utjesenovic, Harry Williams, Atti Abonyi and Adrian Alston and was coached by Rale Rasic. A little over three years prior, the nucleus of this squad had won the Socceroos' first piece of silverware at the 1967 Friendship Cup during the height of the Vietnam war. Three years later they would travel to Germany for the 1974 FIFA World Cup, the first in Australia's history.

The achievements of this remarkable group of young men has never been properly recognised. They won the Tokyo International

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against a Danish side and two Japanese XI's, and the cover illustration shows them celebrating in the Olympic Stadium. It is a devastatingly poignant image that speaks volumes about a forgotten but pioneering group of individuals who forged early links with Asia. The players appear surprised and happy, laughing and revelling around big Manfred Schaefer who triumphantly holds the Cup aloft. A desolate, empty stadium surrounds them, while the grass is patchy underfoot. They appear alone and frozen in time, their success a shared secret.

Any discussion about the future of the game must be grounded in a solid understanding of the past, and there are threads that link the past and present throughout this edition of *Leopold Method*, some which have been exploited and recognised and others which have been forgotten. Kate Cohen speaks to A-League coaches about participating in the Asian Champions League, while Kieran Pender writes about little-known Australian coaches forging their own paths in Asia.

Richard Parkin's article on the challenges facing women's football includes a case study of North West Sydney Women's Football Association. He speaks to Kim Schaefer, the daughter of Rasic's colossal centre back Manfred. Andrew Dettre's visionary newspaper *Soccer World* is recognised as the first organ to campaign for Australia to join Asia. Dettre, of course, was the organiser of St. George's tour of Japan in 1971.

Scott McIntyre takes us on a journey through Japan, and traces the history and achievements of their development system. Shaun Mooney looks at how new migrants – many of them from Asia – participate in football in Australia, while Vince Rugari explores the brief relationship between soccer and Australian Rules football in the National Soccer League.

Football, wrote British author David Winner, 'floats on an ocean of nostalgia, sentimentality, tradition and myth in which historicity

is constantly invoked and celebrated. Fans speak without irony of their club's "heritage", "heroes" and "legends", and their own part in the glory.'

Winner, most assuredly, was not writing about football in Australia. We are constantly told that our history is a source of shame. Think of the slogans that are regularly attached to football – it is 'the sleeping giant' or 'the new kid on the block' emerging from 'the bad old days'. Even Johnny Warren's famous maxim 'I Told You So' urges us to look forward. Football in Australia is always on the verge of happening. It is the game for tomorrow.

Ironically, the effects of football's recent and electrifying boom have had a damaging effect on the game's culture. The past is constantly and pejoratively juxtaposed with the present. Rather than a tool for ensuring stability and belonging, as Winner suggests is the case in England, our football history is ransacked to justify the present. Where other sports have their golden era myths, we try to outrun our past. This sense of self-hatred is as divisive as it is dangerous.

Any attempt to marry history with the present will naturally be met with some scepticism. The FFA's blasé attitude to the game's history has created lingering resentment to any overtures for reconciliation. But while there is bitterness and hurt there is an opportunity to heal. Sport has the potential to turn forgotten stories into national myths and legends, and raise up ordinary men and women to become heroes, visionaries and pioneers. It is only fair that when we talk about the Asian Cup or the Wanderers in the Asian Champions League, we remember the efforts of the Socceroos in South Vietnam and St. George Budapest at the Tokyo International. History should not be an abstraction. It is a living breathing organism, and this recent era of success allows us an opportunity to weave the game back into the story of our nation, and work towards strengthening its position for the future. There is no better-positioned sport to lead Australia into the Asian Century.



THE LONG ROAD TO ASIA

JOE GORMAN

ALIREZA EHSANI IS A FORMER IRANIAN YOUTH INTERNATIONAL now living in Sydney. In September 2014, he established the Iranian Football Association of Australia to represent one of the country's biggest Asian communities. Ehsani is adamant that he wants to work with the FFA to produce talent for the A-League. 'We want to bring up young Iranian players,' he told *Leopold Method* enthusiastically, but lamented the fact that FFA did not want any 'ethnic' clubs in their competitions. He said this was a catalyst for setting up an independent association.

The story of Australian football's strange relationship with Asia, and Asian communities, goes back long before Ehsani's football association, and long before Australia was announced as the host of the 2015 Asian Cup. Following the announcement in July 2011, you would think the football community in Australia would have made more noise. But there was no party at the headquarters of Football Federation Australia, no great celebrations among football fans, no front pages or special broadcasts. Was it the timing? One month after receiving just one vote from FIFA's executive committee for its bid to host the 2022 World Cup, perhaps Australians saw the Asian Cup as the consolation prize. 'No doubt we were disappointed with that outcome,' said then FFA chief executive Ben Buckley of the World Cup bid, 'but this [the Asian Cup] is a fantastic event in its own right.'

Bonita Mersiades was, at the time, an employee of the FFA and heavily involved in Australia's failed World Cup bid. She told *Leopold Method* the FFA were approached by the Asian Football Confederation to host the tournament. It is understood that committing to hosting the Asian Cup would curry favour with the AFC Executive, who would then support Australia's World Cup bid. Mersiades believes the Asian Cup was viewed as a 'dry run' for the World Cup. Just five years after joining the AFC and as the only bidder, Australia found itself the first 'western' nation to be named host of Asia's top national football tournament.

By the end of 2011, a Local Organising Committee was established to sell the tournament to Australians, but it wasn't long before some powerful cynics emerged. Eddie McGuire, a TV personality and the president of Australian Rules football side Collingwood, predicted the Cup would be 'a lemon', while prominent sportswriter Richard Hinds warned it 'could be a tough sell'. These concerns were swatted away by Les Murray of SBS, who pointed to the potential TV ratings bonanza the tournament would provide for football in the region. More importantly, Murray wrote,

It's not just about football. It's about us as a nation and about where we want to belong. In 2015 Australia will be hosting the Asian Cup, the first time an Asian championship of any sport will be held on our soil. Think of what that will say to its audiences both in Australia and across the Asian continent. It will tell Australians that, despite the map-makers, we are part of Asia. It will tell Asians that we are among them and want to be among them.

As a long-time champion of Australia joining its Asian neighbours in football, Murray's argument repeated a well-worn phrase in football circles. 'We are part of Asia.' The words have a celestial, almost regal quality. The reality, of course, is rather more complex.

‘THERE IS NOT VERY MUCH REAL *FEEL* FOR ASIA’

Australia’s relationship with Asia in football stretches as far back as 1923, when a Chinese side toured the country to enormous crowds, but for almost a century there were peaks and troughs when it came to engagement. Opinions differ on why this is the case. Many point to the historical resistance of key Asian powerbrokers to Australia joining the Asian Football Confederation, while others say Australia has never done enough on the diplomatic front to truly warrant Asia’s respect.

The first official overture from Australia to join the AFC was in 1960, during a period in which Australia was banned from FIFA for poaching overseas players. Despite this ban, the 1960s were a boom period for Australian football as thousands of new, football-loving migrants from Europe settled in Australia. However, the governance of the game was still highly fractured and disorganised, and many initiatives that might have given the game a strong foundation were stymied by self-interest from clubs and the federations. Engaging with Asia was one of these wasted opportunities.

The great Australian soccer boom during the 1960s was set amid larger tectonic shifts occurring in the region. Large parts of Asia and Africa were in the last stages of decolonisation, and Australia – in its own unique fashion – was grappling with the gradual decline of the British Empire. By 1968, Prime Minister John Gorton noted ‘a commendable emptiness in Australians about their place in the world’. With more diverse migration Australia was becoming an open, multicultural society, and no other sport was more representative of this than football. The new ethnic clubs with emotional and cultural links to parts of Europe had wrested control of the game from the established Anglo-British order, and were steering it in exciting new directions. ‘The air was infused with the spirit of triumph which encouraged innovative and sometimes extravagant thinking, a kind of dreaming aloud,’ wrote football historian Trevor Thompson.

In Asia football reflected a new sense of identity, yet unlike Australia it was used to greater effect by politicians to help shape this new focus. In August 1957, as the Malaysians celebrated their Independence Day, a new Cup competition was established to mark the historic occasion. The Merdeka Cup – merdeka meaning ‘freedom’ – quickly became one of the most prestigious tournaments in Asia, and was backed by Malaysia’s first Prime Minister and father of Malaysian football Tunkul Abdul Rahman. As early as 1965, Australia was invited to participate. Initially, the Australian Soccer Federation accepted the invitation, leading *Soccer World* journalist Lou Gautier to predict ‘a new era in Australia’s soccer relations in Asia’.

Chaos ensued. By early 1966 the ASF was informed that airfares to and from Malaysia wouldn’t be covered by Kuala Lumpur, but Rahman was so keen to keep Australia in the tournament that he approached Australian Prime Minister Harold Holt to cover the shortfall. When Holt declined the ASF decided they couldn’t justify the expense and withdrew. In a curious twist, in 1967 Western Australia decided they would venture where the ASF wouldn’t. Led by Julius Re, the Western Australia Soccer Federation raised \$8000 to fund the trip, and when the ASF requested five players from the eastern states be included in the party, its request was turned down. Having raised the money and taken the gamble, the Western Australians were going it alone.

At *Soccer World*, journalists were apoplectic. ‘We have said it before, and say it again,’ wrote Lou Gautier after the 1967 tournament. ‘Australia must take part in the Merdeka [Cup] every year.’ Later, Gautier revealed that local clubs would not release their best players for the tournament, which clashed with the domestic seasons. Club self-interest was more important than Asian engagement. In his strongest criticism of his countrymen, Gautier wrote,

Our officials, and a majority of our fans, however, are ingrained with a 'European' or 'British' complex. They are looking at it from the wrong end. European soccer shouldn't be our yardstick – not yet anyway. It's in Asia that we have to prove ourselves.

It was a battle *Soccer World* would not win. While the rest of Asia turned its focus to Malaysia every year, little Australia busied itself with provincial suburban kick-about between Sutherland and APIA Leichhardt, for example, or exhibition tours by British and European clubs. Soon the invites from Malaysia stopped coming.

In 1967 New Zealand, and by proxy Australia, was rejected from being part of the Asian Games. 'Australia is a continent in itself and by no stretch of the imagination can be labeled "Asian",' commented the *Bangkok Post*. 'The Asian Games are run by Asians, for Asians.' Yet while there was resistance to Australia joining the multi-sport Asian Games, football always presented a unique opportunity to break down barriers. Later that year, the Liberal Holt Government sent an Australian side to the 1967 Friendship Cup at the height of the Vietnam War. In his biography Johnny Warren bluntly called the event 'a public relations exercise to help win the Vietnamese people to the cause of the United States-led forces'. Australia won the tournament, and Warren was part of a nucleus of players that later travelled to the 1974 World Cup. It is often said that the 1967 Friendship Cup, set among bomb blasts and landmines in the battlefields of Vietnam, is the birthplace of the Socceroos.

According to research by football historian Roy Hay, Australia were referred to as 'Uc Dai Lois' and the 'Con Son people' by the Vietnamese. Both names have some bearing on Australia's budding relationship with Asia. The former means 'those from a land of great interest', while the latter referred to the name of Vietnam's largest prison. Despite being curious about Australians, the Vietnamese saw us as imprisoned by British imperialism. Perhaps they knew

us better than we did ourselves. Valiant efforts by players were not followed up with diplomacy by the ASF, and another opportunity to break free from a colonial football mentality was wasted.

It was *Soccer World*, more than any other newspaper or individual, that led Australia's charge into Asia. As early as 1960, Andrew Dettre (writing under the *nom de plume* 'Paul Dean') was recommending that Australia affiliate with the AFC. In 1972, five years after the Friendship Cup in South Vietnam, Dettre set off with Tibor Kalman on a mission to Asia.

'Tibor Kalman was a well-to-do man, he offered to pay the expenses,' Dettre told *Leopold Method*. 'He was my friend and my host. We went to Singapore, Hong Kong, Japan, Korea, Thailand, everywhere. It was three weeks or something, on behalf of the Australian Soccer Federation. When I came back, I wrote a report, saying every effort should be made to become part of Asia, because they will not come to you begging you to join, but with the right approach, they will let you in.'

The right approach. Those words would haunt Australian football for nearly three decades, as the Asians repeatedly refused to accept Australia into their confederation. Most famously, in 1974, the President of the ASF Sir Arthur George was humiliated at the AFC Congress. Before his passing George spoke about a representative from Kuwait referring to 'the murderers of Taiwan, the criminals of Israel... and the super criminals of Australia'.

Australia was a nation caught between territorial realities and the imagined community in Europe and the UK. When we looked around at our neighbours, we didn't much like what we saw. Imagine, for a moment, that a European or British head of state had invited Australia to take part in a continental football tournament, as the Malaysians had with the Merdeka Cup? Heaven and earth would have been moved to get the best players there in green and gold. Still yet to dismantle the White Australia Policy, Australia resented its isolation from ties to kinship in Europe and the UK. In his seminal book *The Lucky Country: Australia in the Sixties*, noted historian Donald Horne wrote,

If the impression has been given that no one in Australia ever thinks of Asia, it should be pointed out that this is now far from true. Over the last ten years or so there has been a huge shift in attitudes. Sensations burst into the newspapers, seminars are held, articles are written. But the interest is sometimes that of someone momentarily attracted to an idea: *Fascinating stuff I must find out what it's all about sometime*. There is not very much real *feel* for Asia.

Horne, of course, was not referring to football, but his musings might as well have been published as an op-ed in *Soccer World*. We were far too big and ambitious for our pithy surrounds in Oceania, but not yet seen as a part of the continent on our doorstep. Asia was an exercise in exotica, a hobby horse of a few frustrated journalists.

‘ASIANS HAVE ALWAYS PERCEIVED US TO BE VERY EUROCENTRIC’

‘In the past 30 years the government of Australia has moved from the extreme of wanting a white Australia,’ said historian Geoffrey Blainey in 1984, ‘to the extreme of saying that we will have an Asian Australia and that the quicker we move towards it the better.’

Blainey’s infamous book *All For Australia*, published in 1984, was the most significant 20th-century critique of the government’s multicultural policy, and it represented a reaction primarily to Asian refugees and migrants. Blainey wrote that multiculturalism ‘cut the crimson threads of kinship’, and ‘gnaws at that sense of solidarity that many people crave’. In 1988, the leader of the Liberal Party John Howard questioned the intake of Asian migrants on talkback radio. The multicultural consensus was crumbling, and Asian migration appeared to be the catalyst.

In football, the wasted opportunities of the 1960s and 1970s were the original sin from which the game would take decades to recover. As a cultural pursuit, football is a product of its

environment, and as Australia grappled with a new multicultural identity during the 1980s, the Australian game navel-gazed and agonised over its ethnic image. As a result, the game contracted sharply and any momentum built up in the early days of the National Soccer League was lost.

Dettre called this ‘the neurotic search for a place in the sun’, while Hay has written that football ‘marked time’ while the other codes moved ahead. True engagement with Asia was virtually non-existent. Australia was firmly part of the Oceania Football Confederation, and although the Socceroos played against Asian opposition in little tournaments such as the Merlion Cup or the Presidents Cup, for example, the links remained spasmodic. Asian-Australian players were extremely rare, and Asian football simply wasn’t part of the national conversation.

By 1990, however, Australia was irreversibly on its way to seeing itself as part of Asia. Trade with Asia had increased dramatically, the White Australia Policy was well and truly dead, and Paul Keating was emerging as the first politician to truly look to Asia, following Gough Whitlam’s and Bob Hawke’s China overtures. Keating saw the decline of what he labelled ‘the Anglosphere’, and as Asian countries looked to go their own way politically and culturally, Keating wanted Australia to go with them. In a speech in 1992 called *Australia and Asia: Knowing Who We Are*, Keating encouraged a ‘cultural reform, the reform of our outlook’.

The rise in Asian football became a strategic opportunity for Australia. In 1993, the J.League was established, while lucrative leagues across South East Asia were attracting Australian players. As Abbas Saad, Alistair Edwards, Alan Davidson and many other Australian players left to play football in Malaysia and Singapore, the football conversation drifted back to Asia. In a 1993 interview with *Australian and British Soccer Weekly*, Les Murray said Australia’s future was in Asia, and that it was a ‘gold mine’ for football.

It is not without some irony that Western Australia – which was still yet to be represented in the NSL – would be the first to develop the most significant links with Asia. In 1994 a privately run football club, Perth Kangaroos IFC, participated in the Singapore Premier League for one season. After winning the competition at a canter, the experiment helped force a Perth team into the NSL, and turned eyes towards other opportunities in the region. Tom Mackay, a former President of the Soccer Association of Western Australia, told *Leopold Method* that the Perth Kangaroos ‘caused a lot of interest’ from the national governing body, who were upset at the Western Australians ‘stealing the march’ into Asia. As in the 1960s with the Merdeka Cup, Western Australia’s proximity to South East Asia led to it having greater vision than the Australian Soccer Federation. Geographic realities and a lack of government funding prevented any Asian Cup games being held in Perth in 2015, which seems a shame considering their pioneering role in opening Australian eyes to the region.

Elsewhere, Steve Doszpot, the current member for Molonglo in the ACT, was an early advocate for football during the Keating years. Like Andrew Dettre and Les Murray, Doszpot was born in Hungary and instinctively understood football’s global appeal. He remembers fighting with government bureaucrats to use football, instead of Australian Rules football or cricket, as a political and diplomatic link with Asian nations. In 1994, Keating announced ‘no country is more important to Australia than Indonesia’, and Doszpot helped with the sporting arm of Keating’s *Australia Today, Indonesia 1994* event.

Alongside his close friend Tom Sermanni, Doszpot remembers the difficulty in working with Australians to understand the importance of cultivating relationships with Asia. In 1994, a match between Adelaide City and an Indonesian side was scheduled on the same day as the World Cup final in 1994. The Indonesians wanted to change the date, but the Australian organisers, who

weren't familiar with football, didn't want to shift. 'They said, "what does a World Cup match in the USA have to do with putting a match on in Indonesia?"' said Doszpot.

In the ensuing fallout, both Doszpot and Sermanni resigned to 'save face' with the Indonesians, and barely 1000 people turned up to watch the match in Jakarta. Two months later, Doszpot received a request by a contact in Indonesia to find Australian players that could fill an Indonesian Select XI to play Italian giants Sampdoria. In the same stadium, Kris Trajanovski, Andy Bernal and Robbie Ironside played in front of more than 100,000 people.

'I remember the Australian ambassador at the time was quite astonished,' Doszpot explained. 'We'd spent something like \$5 million promoting this *Australia Today, Indonesia 94* and very rarely did we get much coverage in Indonesian press. Two soccer players playing in the Indonesian national team, and next day one of our players was on the front page, and the headline was something like "Australia and Indonesia together".'

When David Hill assumed control of the ASF in 1995, he appointed Doszpot as an Asian ambassador. Still, when Hill attempted to join the Asian Football Confederation in 1996, he was humiliated on the world stage by a vote of 179-1. Almost three decades after Australia declined to be part of the Merdeka Cup, Malaysia – led by then Prime Minister Dr Mahathir Mohamad – was a powerful veto. In 2004 Johnny Warren wrote that 'Australia must get its act together with Asia'.

It has always been such an obvious thing for us to do, but both as a sport and as a country, we have been pathetic when it comes to Asia. Our eyes are always trained on Europe and it is time we got over it... Then we are like the bloke who expects to score with a sheila he's just met: there is no courting, no relationship building, no cups of tea in the morning. We have been guilty of the old 'How about a fuck?' line.

Doszpot, a good friend of Johnny's from his days at St. George Budapest and Canberra City, puts it more diplomatically. 'I think that part of the problem is that the Asians have always perceived us to be very Eurocentric. They felt we didn't want to come to them.'

'IT WILL TELL ASIANS THAT WE ARE AMONG
THEM AND WANT TO BE AMONG THEM'

When talking of American soccer history two major events stand out. The first is the hosting of the 1994 FIFA World Cup. The second is the 1999 Women's World Cup. In exchange for the right to host the men's World Cup, Major League Soccer was founded in 1993, and kicked off in 1996. In 2001, just two years after hosting the women's World Cup, the first professional women's league – the Women's United Soccer Association – was established.

In Australia, qualification for the 1974 World Cup helped establish the National Soccer League in 1977, while the Socceroos qualification for the 2006 edition was a kick-start the A-League needed just one year after it was established. The common theme is this: in new world football nations, large events have transformative potential. In countries where football struggles to hold the national imagination, events drive participation, create momentum, funnel investment into the game and attract mainstream interest. Football events have the potential to transform the culture of the game, and as a consequence, the nation. In this context, the Asian Cup should be about more than simply football. It was a chance to invite Asia, quite literally, into our homes and into our national conversation.

'We've got to understand the cultural sensitivities that exist across all the countries,' said Doszpot before the tournament. 'I'm not sure if this is fully appreciated at government level, but this is an important nation building activity that our sport can contribute to. Just being part of this Asian Cup is part of this process.'

Doszpot is well positioned to comment. While on the board of the government advisory board CanTrade, he became a friend of former Soccer Australia chairman Ian Knop. He encouraged Knop,

who was close to the Howard Liberal Government, to recognise the benefits of engaging with Asia through football. According to Doszpot, it was the opportunity in Asia that became a primary reason for the Howard Government helping push the reform process in football in 2003.

It is well known that one of Frank Lowy's biggest achievements was in getting FFA into the Asian Football Confederation in 2006. It opened up new vistas for Australian football, regular competition for clubs and national teams, and a chance to play a leading role in cultivating relationships between Australia and Asian nations. Indeed in the Federal Government commissioned *Australia in the Asian Century White Paper*, released in 2012, there was special mention made of 'Football Diplomacy'. The Asian Cup could hardly have come at a better time. But how to leverage the tournament for the betterment of Australian football was a contested issue.

Inside the Local Organising Committee there was some creative tension as to whether they would sell a football tournament or a cultural event. The first appointment to the LOC was chief executive Michael Brown. Brown, of course, is a former AFL player for the North Melbourne Kangaroos and a former CEO of the Hawthorn Hawks. His previous role was as CEO of Cricket Australia, continuing a post-2003 tradition of non-football people taking the reigns of the administration of the world game.

'A team probably reflects its leader,' one staff member of the LOC told *Leopold Method* before the tournament. 'Football is not his sport. Football people tend to have a little more international awareness than your Aussie Rules types. We've got people working who don't understand our position in Asian football or politically. They've worked in rugby league or AFL and are domestically focused.' Another person close to the LOC also queried his appointment, putting it a little more bluntly. 'For a once in a lifetime Asian engagement position, Cricket is the last place you would think of looking for a proven Asia literate Chief Executive.'

There were battles along the way to ensure this was an Asia-literate tournament. An advertisement featuring HG Nelson shouting about ‘raw prawns’ and eating meat pies at a sushi train was commissioned by an advertising agency called The Monkeys. In August, I attended an Arab Film Festival in Parramatta in Sydney’s west for a screening of the Jordanian-Egyptian football film *The United*. The theatre was packed with west Asian football fans, and the ad was met with a moment of awkward silence, before everybody broke into laughter. It went down like a lead balloon.

‘The two marketing guys come from rugby league backgrounds,’ a source inside the LOC said. ‘That ad is not targeted towards Asian audiences. We laughed about it internally imagining what they would have thought when they [the AFC] received the ad. They all must have stood around going “what the fuck is this?”’

Yet despite these hiccups, the LOC still went beyond its remit to ensure a legacy is left after the Cup. A subsidiary company of the FFA, the LOC was only ever a temporary organisation designed to sell tickets. It ran on a budget of \$75 million – \$60 million of which came from Federal and State Governments and \$15 million that needed to be recouped through ticketing revenue. ‘The first part is getting people into stadiums, the second is legacy and getting them into A-League clubs,’ said a source inside the LOC before the tournament. ‘We’re going to be judged by people in stadiums. Everyone in the Organising Committee knows that.’

If the work of the LOC is judged on the bottom line, responsibility for creating an Asian legacy lies elsewhere. ‘I wouldn’t say FFA are champing at the bit to help us,’ said a member of the LOC. ‘When you’re under-resourced, you don’t invest in things that bring you long-term development.’

Mark Falvo, the chief operating officer of the LOC, is one of the few staff members that has transitioned back to FFA. Admitting that Asia is no easy sell, Falvo is determined to carry the legacy

program over with him. According to Falvo, FFA now have far greater data on each Asian community which they can leverage for future engagement, while they also have a greater relationship with government, trade departments and the AFC.

One of these legacy items is an Asian Education Program for schools around the country which the LOC believe reached more than 50,000 students. Other initiatives included running daily pieces on Asian teams during the lead-up to the tournament, while the LOC were at almost every Asian community festival on the east coast spruiking the Asian Cup. A-League teams were approached, but Melbourne Victory and Western Sydney Wanderers were the only clubs that took a real interest in meeting and greeting community ambassadors. They, more than any other stakeholders in the game, might be the greatest beneficiaries of the tournament.

Then there was the 'Adopt a City' program. What was designed to be a wholesale program ended up being a website where individuals, businesses and clubs could voluntarily go and pick a second side. Yet as one member of the LOC explained, 'they're not cuddly teams. One of the African teams that got adopted during the 2003 Rugby World Cup... well they're not Bahrain. Bahrain doesn't make anyone feel warm and fuzzy.' Many schools and businesses did voluntarily adopt a team, but the only substantial example of a city council adopting a team was in Newcastle. In October 2014, Newcastle lord mayor Brad Luke formally adopted Kuwait.

'Our cultures are poles apart,' opined a *Newcastle Herald* editorial soon after. 'The man on the street in Kuwait City dons the dishdasha, not the Bintang singlet, while women get about in the dara'aa instead of denim shorts. That's just weird.' Not long after, a pig's head was thrown at a mosque in Newcastle, in the second such incident in just two weeks. When AFC officials visited Newcastle to inspect Hunter Stadium, they were racially abused by a passer-by. The LOC soon realised they were starting from a low base.

Just after their incredible victory in the Asian Champions League, Western Sydney Wanderers held a mini Asian Cup tournament at Marconi Stadium. Organised by the Wanderers Head of Community Management Tim Thorne, there were among others, migrant teams representing Malaysia, China, Iraq and even Nepal. It was an incredible potpourri of Australia's sporting diversity, and a centrepiece of the Wanderers' 20-year plan to engage with all the cultures in their catchment area.

This represents a rare, progressive and forward-thinking strategy in Australian football. While other sports such as Australian Rules and cricket are trying desperately to connect with multicultural Australia, football has abdicated this responsibility. Instead, FFA has spent the past decade aggressively courting mainstream Australia. But the demographics don't lie. While the United Kingdom is still our biggest source of migrants, between 2006 and 2011 large numbers of migrants came from India, China, the Philippines, Malaysia, Sri Lanka, Vietnam, the Republic of Korea and Iran. Asia is no longer our 'neighbour' – we are increasingly and inevitably a part of Asia. However, Asian-Australians are not setting up clubs with the same gusto and professionalism as the Italians, the Greeks, the Hungarians and the Yugoslavs of yore. They are here, they love football, but importantly, they are setting up associations of their own, outside the structure of the FFA.

'That's one of the things we've taken a bit of time to get our heads around and grapple with,' said Falvo before the tournament. 'Any new arrival to Australia knows football as their first sport. How they then choose to participate in it and consume it... we've seen just like European migrants a few generations ago, there is a tendency to obviously spend time with people of the same country, language and customs. They play football together, often outside the official tent, we've seen the growth of associations of Chinese or Korean communities.

'I don't see that as a bad thing – they're comfortable and that's how they want to play. I guess what football needs to do from an official standpoint is not be exclusive and be open to these

participants. At the LOC we haven't tried to change the way they play the game, [but] what we've done is gone out of our way to attend their events and bring information about the Asian Cup, whether it's an Iranian Futsal competition or a regular Chinese weekend tournament, we've just been there to show the game is interested in them. At a minimum we want the multicultural program to continue so the FFA engages with these communities and they feel comfortable supporting the A-League club in the city in which they live.'

Alireza Ehsani, the man behind the Iranian communities' football association, used to play in a futsal side called the 'Pars Lions' – 'Pars' meaning 'Persian' in Farsi and a lion being an Iranian symbol. When asked if he would like to use such a name in a hypothetical FFA registered club, Ehsani agreed, and hoped the FFA would change their National Club Identity Policy to allow it to happen.

The National Club Identity Policy, which prevents FFA registered clubs from having ethnic or political overtones in their names and logos, is clearly having a deleterious impact. A complaint has been made to the Human Rights Commission by Croatian club Melbourne Knights, but perhaps it is the newer migrant groups who are suffering the most from the policy's draconian and backwards strictures. Asked whether he thought it might act as a deterrent for new migrants joining FFA clubs, Falvo disagreed. 'I have to say that's a policy that's been in place since I've joined the LOC, but no, I don't think so,' he said. 'But what's important is we want them to feel comfortable to continue being involved in the game.'

Ultimately this is a story about FFA's lack of resources. FFA chief executive David Gallop often talks about a 'burden of opportunity' that faces football. One of these burdens, you sense, is Asian integration. According to the head of the A-League, Damien De Bohun, the three major legacy items are the new covered benches,

the pitch upgrade in Newcastle and the education resource. All of these, he says, will benefit Australian football in the long-term. But none of these things create a legacy of engaging with the region. Rather, they are legacy items that Australians alone will benefit from. Asked whether the education resource would retain its Asian content, De Bohun said it would be more A-League focused.

‘I think what it [lack of resources] forces you to do is be more focused on doing fewer things better,’ De Bohun told *Leopold Method* before the tournament. ‘I wouldn’t call it a struggle, I think it probably limits the number of things you can do, but it just sort of makes you focus and go a bit deeper on the things you are doing.’

One legacy item that does not require significant resources and that might’ve had a profound influence is the introduction of an Asian-specific visa player. Many Australian players have exploited this opportunity in Asia, but there is no reciprocal ruling to encourage A-League clubs to recruit Asian talent. Falvo spoke gushingly about Joel Griffiths’ impact on the former NSW Premier Barry O’Farrell when he visited China on a diplomatic trip in 2012. Griffiths was at Beijing Guoan at the time, and was the ‘star of the show’ at the conference. Apparently, Griffiths was considered ‘as big as Nicole Kidman’ in China. He ended up there, of course, as part of an AFC’s dictate to introduce a designated Asian visa player.

‘There has been discussion about it, but we haven’t got there yet,’ De Bohun confirmed. ‘Obviously the number of foreign players is still a hot topic that is being worked through with all the clubs. It’s fair to say that individually there’s a number of clubs that are starting to understand the opportunities of Asia, and where they can recruit players from to increase their market exposure both here and on our doorstep.’

According to De Bohun, fostering relations with Asia is one of his ‘top five strategic priorities.’ Currently this is through the Asian Champions League, which was won in 2014 by Western Sydney Wanderers. ‘The mix of players is always on the rise,’ said

De Bohun. ‘But we want to grow it in a sustainable way. That’s the critical part of the narrative right now.’ Accordingly, De Bohun says there is no time frame for the introduction of an Asian-specific foreign player. This might have been a missed opportunity, both in promoting the tournament and fostering better relations with Asia. When FFA speaks about Asia, there are still shades of an older attitude of what we can take, rather than what we can provide. The focus remains on the benefits we can get out of our association with the region.

There is change in the air, however. The LOC has packed down, but FFA employees such as Mark Falvo are continuing to foster relations with the AFC while Emma Highwood and Robert Squillaciotti will continue the multicultural program. Indeed one of the positive developments about the Asian Cup is that Asian communities are now engaging with the FFA and each other. Eshani said he was looking forward to working with the governing body and the Wanderers in the future, and that he had fielded offers from other Asian associations for regular matches.

After decades of wasted opportunities, Australia’s changing population demands this must be an Asian Century for Australian football. There are thousands of students from Asia in Australian universities, and the future leaders of Asia are as likely to be educated here as anywhere else in the world. The Asian Cup has allowed relationships between community, business and government to germinate. The Communities Program was involved with over 100 events, including community festivals, film festivals, football events, clinics. Two hundred and sixty community ambassadors and 80 Asian media partners were engaged. It is, quite simply, too good an opportunity to let go to waste. The Asian Cup needs to be the harbinger for change, a catalyst to remove the last vestiges of our historic Eurocentrism.

But to ensure the change is a fork rather than simply a bend in the road, it will require true and ongoing engagement. Proper

legacy is not in covered dugouts or pitch upgrades. It is in bringing in and respecting the contribution offered by individuals like Alireza Eshani. 'It's hot now,' he said just before the tournament began. 'The FFA is interested and excited... I hope they don't go cold on us.'



FLIGHTS, FITNESS AND FATIGUE: COMPETING IN THE ASIAN CHAMPIONS LEAGUE

KATE COHEN

WESTERN SYDNEY WANDERERS PLAYERS TRUDGE BACK, LEGS heavy, to defend a Brisbane Roar corner at ‘the Den’ end of a packed Suncorp Stadium. Now more than ever, concentration is a must. It’s the 108th minute of the 2013-14 A-League grand final, the Wanderers’ second consecutive appearance in their short two year existence. Their loss in the 2012-13 grand final at the hands of Central Coast Mariners is still fresh in the memory. Patrick Zwaanswijk’s winner for the Mariners was the first goal the Wanderers had ever conceded from a corner, in the most important match of the season. Surely not again.

As Thomas Broich jogs over to the corner flag, he puffs heavily as each bit of exertion eats away at the body’s finite reserves of energy. The ball, whipped in towards the centre of the box, is cleared. Matthew Spiranovic, who had arced his back to nod the ball away from the path of Brisbane’s Matt Smith, is left on the ground momentarily as cramp sets in. There is no time to stretch, however, as the ball finds its way back out to Broich, who passes

across the box to Shane Stefanutto. Spiranovic gingerly gets to his feet and pushes his defensive line out. After scoring in the 56th minute to put his side 1-0 up, a goal that many thought would have been the winner, Spiranovic is tasked with handling Brisbane's combustible striker Besart Berisha. Brisbane have a knack of staging dramatic comebacks in grand finals – indeed Berisha's equaliser in the 86th minute has led us to this moment.

'I was on the bench, writing down who would be taking penalties,' explained former Wanderers assistant manager Ante Milicic, who said what happened next still hurts. Stefanutto crossed early into the box towards the smallest man on the park – Brazilian substitute Henrique – who out jumped Iacopo La Rocca. The ball fell loose in the box and the Wanderers back four scrambled back to protect the six-yard box. But Henrique is free in the centre, and as James Donachie cuts the ball back into his path, time seems to slow down. Mateo Poljak stops dead in his tracks, watching, waiting, hoping for a different outcome. But even a bobbled first touch couldn't stop him from smashing his shot into the roof of the net. They've done it again. Brisbane lead. Brisbane win.

When you lose a grand final, you want the ground to swallow you up. You want to be able to return to the sanctity of the dressing room. You don't want to stand and watch the victors celebrate. Not when you've gone so close... twice. But wait the Wanderers must, and one-by-one the players took the long walk to the stage to collect their runners up medals. With each step they wasted more energy and more time to recover for the next game. By the time they had returned to the dressing room, there was 72 hours until the Wanderers would take to the field in a vital Asian Champions League Round of 16 tie in Hiroshima, Japan.

'The mood in the sheds after the final was sombre, [we were] so close yet so far,' Wanderers strength and conditioning coach Adam Waterson told *Leopold Method*. 'We played well that day and it could have gone either way. The boys were really shattered.'

‘The dressing room was a disaster,’ said Milicic. ‘There was a quiet disbelief and it was like that until we got to the hotel and we sat down and had dinner together.’ Soon after, the players and support staff went straight to the airport to catch a flight back to Sydney. They would stay that night at a hotel nearby Kingsford Smith Airport, ready to fly out at first light the next morning. But their trip was made that little bit more difficult by needing to first land in Tokyo before catching a connecting flight to Hiroshima to face Sanfrecce Hiroshima.

‘The grand final was my last day with the Wanderers because I then started working for the Socceroos,’ said Milicic. ‘It was a big job for “Popa” [manager Tony Popovic] and the staff to get the boys up for the next game in Hiroshima, which, ok, we lost, but we got a late away goal which was job done in a way.’

Tomi Juric’s 77th minute penalty in the away leg was one of the less heralded moments of the Wanderers’ fairy tale Champions League but proved to be crucial as the Wanderers overcame the first leg deficit to advance on the away goals rule. They had overcome heartbreak, having lost the grand final just prior, as well as a tricky travel schedule to make it through to the quarter finals of the competition. Job done. But such a short turnaround between playing in the biggest game of the domestic season and travelling to Asia for a crucial Champions League tie was a challenge unique to the Wanderers. Just 12 months earlier, Central Coast Mariners had just 48 hours in between their grand final victory and playing an important group stage match away in South Korea. Celebrations were kept in check, with no time to waste in recovering and preparing for their game against Suwon Bluewings.

‘We played the grand final on the Sunday night in Sydney and we did whatever recovery we could straight after the game,’ said former Central Coast Head of Strength and Conditioning Andrew Clark. ‘We made sure the players got sleep that night so we stayed at the airport and flew out the next morning. We flew all day Monday, with feeding and hydration strategies on the plane, got to the hotel Monday night and did a light recovery session that night.

‘Even though we got the players up and moving on the plane, because of the low humidity and the long time in a confined space, it affects how the body recovers. So we made sure we put some strategies in place to counteract that and as soon as we got there [at the hotel] we did a recovery session, fed them and then they went to bed. The next morning was Tuesday. That was match day... on Tuesday morning, we got up, did the same things again, more recovery, made sure the players were hydrated, had a light training session in the morning, had match day lunch, our pre-match meeting, played the game and crossed our fingers.’

Central Coast Mariners won their game against Suwon 1-0, with Michael McGlinchey scoring a late winner. It was a victory that proved to be vital in securing qualification for the knockout stages, but it was done in difficult circumstances. With minimal time to recover, even less time to celebrate their champion status and an 11 hour flight overseas, the Mariners had overcome their difficult schedule. But Clark – who was involved in three Champions League campaigns with the Mariners – admitted that even with only 48 hours between matches, the Mariners they were lucky that travel to Suwon was relatively stress free.

‘Even though the game after the grand final was a Sunday-Tuesday turnaround, the travel was pretty good,’ Clark explained. ‘But we’ve also had games on Saturday and Wednesday where the Wednesday game is difficult to get to and that’s as difficult, or sometimes more difficult, than a Sunday-Tuesday schedule.’

The Mariners’ mid-week travel schedule was no match for what Adelaide United had to compete with during their run to the Champions League final in 2008. Sandwiched between two A-League games, Adelaide United travelled to Tashkent to face Uzbek giants FC Bunyodkor in the second leg of their semi-final tie. Former Adelaide player Travis Dodd explained their extraordinary trip in *Adelaide United: Chasing the Holy Grail*, a documentary looking back at their campaign which saw them fall at the final

hurdle against Gamba Osaka.

I think we flew to Singapore, then to India and then from India to Uzbekistan. In the final leg, from India to Uzbekistan, we [had] business class [seats] because it was probably one of the most difficult things, having to do all of this travel in economy class. It was great to be able to go business class but it was a massive burden on the club financially to be able to provide that for us. So next thing you know [we were] arriving at Tashkent airport at two o'clock in the morning, with everything shut and people having to make calls to come and open customs for us.

'We were at customs for quite a while, trying to get visas to get into the country,' said then-manager Aurelio Vidmar. 'When we got there some guy came up to us and said "give us all your passports" and like idiots we did. He had 25 passports in his hand and he disappeared for about an hour. We were sitting there thinking "what the hell is going on?" but \$2,000 later, we got our visas and off we went.'

Adelaide survived the nightmare trip, losing 1-0 but advancing to the final on aggregate 3-1. But the job was not finished yet. With less than 90 hours to prepare for their next A-League game, at home to Perth Glory, a 34 hour journey back with multiple stopovers was needed.

As Western Sydney Wanderers fans packed the streets of Parramatta to celebrate their success in Asia, the magnitude of the achievement was clear. Many have argued that the Asian Champions League has not been shown the respect it deserves as a competition, an indictment on Australia's relationship with the continent. Until the Wanderers' success in defeating Saudi giants Al Hilal in the 2014 Asian Champions League final, only Adelaide United (twice) had progressed past the first knock-out phase of the competition. Just two other clubs – Central Coast Mariners and Newcastle Jets –

have progressed out of the group stages in Australia's eight season involvement in the competition. While some may point towards a lack of priority given to the ACL, those statistics prove that the odds are stacked against Australian clubs. Long and difficult trips to China, South Korea and Japan are made all the more difficult when coupled with incompatible A-League and Champions League schedules, while A-League clubs also struggle to compete financially with their Asian counterparts.

Preparation for participating in the Champions League begins months before a ball is kicked. During the pre-season, coaches work hard to ensure their players reach a certain level of fitness that will enable them to withstand the rigours of competing in both domestic and continental competitions. The real planning, however, begins in December, when the groups and match day dates are announced. Once this is known, clubs look to confirm travel arrangements in preparation of their busy playing schedules.

'The planning process for our ACL campaign begins as soon as the draw is released,' explained Waterson. 'Then we know exactly what flights we need to take, if it's a direct flight or not, and we can look at which hotel we stay and ideally book a hotel with the right facilities to help us recover from the travel and prepare for the game: a pool, spa, gym, team room, leisure facilities etc.'

While A-League clubs are used to travelling great distances for games, particularly to and for Wellington and Perth, the distances required to reach Asian opponents are long and tricky to navigate. Direct flights from Australia's three major east coast cities – Sydney, Melbourne and Brisbane – to Tokyo, Seoul or Beijing can result in varied travel times. A flight from Brisbane to Tokyo, the shortest trip calculated, is nine and a half hours in transit, with more time and energy consumed prior to and after the long journey. A flight from Melbourne to Beijing can take up to 12 hours. When competing in Asia, luck of the draw can play a major role in determining the difficulty of the travel and recovery schedules.

'Depending on the draw, where you travel can be massively different,' said Clark. 'To say you're playing one team in China

means you could be playing a team in Guangzhou or a team which will take three connecting flights to get there.'

Milicic explained that meeting a Chinese and a Korean team, neither of which were based in a major city, made life difficult for the Wanderers. 'For the Korean team, Ulsan, we had to fly from Sydney to Seoul and stay overnight near the airport,' he said. 'Then the next day we had to go to a different airport in Seoul to take the connecting flight to Ulsan and then we had a one and a half hour bus trip on top of that.'

These factors are taken into consideration when determining when flights should be taken. Should the team fly out in the morning and fly all day? Or should flights be overnight? If there is a connecting flight required, should the team spend the night at a nearby hotel when they first arrive? Or should they continue to catch the connecting flight to get there earlier? These decisions are made even more difficult, considering recovery is the primary focus in between A-League and Champions League games. On top of an already fatigued body, the demanding nature of long haul travel has a big impact on the players' bodies.

'When our players were travelling for over eight or so hours, we almost counted it as another session in their loading cycle, even though they weren't doing anything, because it's so taxing on their bodies,' said Clark. 'Even though they're only standing up, sitting down and eating and drinking what we've provided for them, we still know that has a physical cost that they're either going to play for in that next match, or later down the track.'

'So that even impacts how you manage post-group stage or post-Champions League. With the accumulative effect of those games, you have to pay for that somewhere down the track. So you always have to allow the players to freshen up so they can continue in the long term over the course of the season otherwise at some point, they're going to break.'

With short turnarounds in between A-League and Champions League games, sometimes only two days in between matches, Waterson described recovery as the ‘top priority’, with the coaching staff ‘doing everything possible to try and regenerate the players before the next game.’ But in many instances, their efforts to ensure players are fully recovered is not helped by an incompatible A-League and Champions League playing schedule.

There is no prescribed time for player science – each individual body reacts and recovers in unique ways and at unique rates. This makes managing the situation and juggling mid-week schedules even more difficult. Experience is essential, both from the coaching staff to gauge a players fatigue levels and from the player in knowing their own body. Through the experience of dealing with a collection of individuals, the coaching staff can begin to understand which player is able to back up with a short turnaround or which player doesn’t deal well with hot or cold conditions. As each ACL campaign passes, Australian clubs and their staff gain more vital experience. If ensuring recovery is top priority, in order to achieve that, gathering information and constant communication is essential.

‘No player recovers at exactly the same rate,’ said Clark. ‘The better the knowledge you have – on how each individual recovers, how they travel, how they deal with playing in heat, how they play in cold – will all dictate how you manage the situation. There are some players who can’t cope in the heat, especially if there’s a short turnaround, then some players can do a three-day turnaround back-to-back-to-back and will show no [negative] effects. It all comes down to gathering knowledge on the players and gathering knowledge on the places you’re going to so you can work out what effect travel and what effect the environment you’re travelling to will have on each player.’

According to Milicic, it simply comes down to the player. ‘Some players can do more, some can do less,’ he said. ‘That’s why it requires a lot of planning and a lot of meeting, with the medical staff and the coaching staff to work out what outcome we want from

training, how long it's going to go for, what the individual player loads are, how will this affect their body etc. Every player wants to play every game, but it's our job as coaches to work out who is best suited for the next fixture. You don't always get it right but you need to make sure you have as much information as possible to give yourself the best chance of making the correct decision. That's why we would always be meeting together and speaking about every detail.

'It was actually outrageous how much we would meet... We would speak endlessly, at all hours of the day, to discuss the tiniest of details. We ended up having a rule at my house: during dinner, Popa was the only person I was able to answer the phone. That's what it got to.'

But even as coaches, clubs and players become more familiar with the challenges competing in Asia poses, gathering information, planning and communication can only go so far when you are dealing with certain unavoidable factors. The time in between games in multiple competitions remains a crucial factor when achieving the top priority of ensuring the players are fully recovered from the previous game and prepared for the next one.

A 2012 study conducted by the World Football Academy looked at how different recovery times impacted the objective outcome of a match. The study, which analysed 27,002 games of European teams competing in various domestic leagues as well as the UEFA Champions League or UEFA Europa League, found that the number of days in between games greatly impacts the outcome of the next match. A team with only two days recovery was 39% less likely to win at home and 42% less likely to win away from home when they faced a team with three or more days recovery. Also, a team with only two days recovery scored 70% less goals and conceded 75% more goals after the 60 minute mark. For Australian clubs competing in Asia, travel commitments far outweigh those of clubs competing in Europe, which further emphasises the need for time

to allow players to sufficiently recover during a Champions League schedule.

Speaking to *Leopold Method*, World Football Academy founder Raymond Verheijen said that due to insufficient time to recover from the previous game, players transfer fatigue into the next game making them less likely to have a positive result. There is also a greater impact of players suffering from fatigue-related injuries.

‘What we found was that two days between games is too short, that players are still fatigued on that third day when they have to play the next game,’ said Verheijen. ‘Basically, it has to do with the fact that after a game you accumulate fatigue, you produce fatigue, you have to get rid of it – you have to recover. The day after the game you do a recovery session to speed up that process, and normally on the second day after the game, you have a day off.

‘On the second day after intensive work, the body is at its lowest. For football players, the day after the game [is for] recovery, the second day after game [is a day] off. But if you only have two days between games, then on that second day after the last game, is the last day before the next game. And what you don’t want is a day off the day before a game – so you have to train. So while the body is at its lowest and needs a rest day, you need to prepare for the next game, which means that you cannot fully recover from the last game because you’re already training again. So you have unfinished business when you play the next game. So you start the game with fatigue from the previous game.’

In the 2014 Asian Champions League competition, 19 matches were played by Australian clubs that coincided with their A-League campaigns. Of those, only six allowed for at least three days in between games. That means more than two thirds of the time, teams had to manage playing schedules that directly impacted the likelihood of them having a successful outcome in a match.

With the luck of the draw and scheduling, Central Coast Mariners were able to have three of their six group stage matches

with at least three days in between matches. One example of this type of schedule was in the game before and after their second group stage match at home to Sanfrecce Hiroshima. The Mariners played a Friday night A-League game before their Tuesday night Champions League fixture, meaning the players had Saturday, Sunday and Monday to recover and prepare. Their next A-League game was on a Saturday night, meaning recovery and preparation could take place on Wednesday, Thursday and Friday after their Tuesday night match.

Conversely, five out of the six of Melbourne Victory's group stage matches in 2014 involved short turnarounds with only two days between games. On one occasion, Melbourne Victory had to play three games in seven days. Playing in the A-League on a Saturday afternoon, Victory next played in the Champions League on a Tuesday night before backing up for a Friday night A-League elimination final against rivals Sydney FC. Victory came out of that tricky scheduling with three important wins, but as Clark says, the accumulative effect of matches must be paid for somewhere down the track

'It's definitely been difficult in the past, with no real allowances from FFA and from AFC for them to work together with scheduling. I've experienced that with having a Sunday afternoon Grand Final in Australia and a Tuesday night game in Korea.'

The odds are stacked against A-League clubs as they look to progress through the group stages and beyond in the Asian Champions League. With long away trips to clubs in China, South Korea and Japan, clubs work hard to ensure their players are able to be fully recovered and prepared for the upcoming matches. But despite planning and experience, only so much can be done to ensure players are recovered and prepared for the next match when there is often only two days in between games to recover. This reduces the chances of success for Australian clubs in Asia, particularly when they face clubs with budgets that dwarf their own. The regular media narrative of super-rich Asian superpowers often occurs when a Guangzhou Evergrande, Al Hilal or FC

Bunyodkor travels to Australia. Their budgets, salaries and star studded squads are compared to those of their A-League opponents to highlight Australia's underdog status as they face a giant of Asia. And while some may feel that narrative is tired, there is no denying the financial realities A-League clubs face in Asia.

'Before the home leg, Bunyodkor called the club, Adelaide, and asked them where they were going to park their private jet,' said Travis Dodd before the second leg of Adelaide United's final against the Uzbek club. Aurelio Vidmar similarly lamented a lack of resources, comparing Bunyodkor's chartered flight to Adelaide 'struggling to get Qantas to get us out of the terminal'.

In 2012, the average J.League club's revenue was 3.15 billion yen, or AU\$36.6 million. That average club revenue dwarfs the revenues of Australia's most profitable club, Melbourne Victory, who posted revenues of AU\$16.2 million in the latest financial year. Outside of the implications on the size of the playing squad or the quality of the players, with A-League clubs adhering to a salary and squad cap, these financial disparities impact logistical factors that affect the success of a team in Asia.

'We [the staff] managed all of the logistics during the group stages,' said Milicic. 'I know that before the final, Popa sent a staff member to watch Al Hilal but before then, we didn't. The staff at the Wanderers had it organised really well, they did their homework and wherever we went, the connections, there were people waiting for us, it was all organised quite well but ideally, we would be able to send someone over in advance to organise all of that. But that comes down to budget and in an ideal world that would be the case.'

'I remember when we were playing Kawasaki Frontale, they sent some of their staff over early to double check the hotel, the meeting rooms and the recovery facilities were up to scratch, to see how far away from the hotel the stadium was, to check the pitch and dressing rooms etc. That is what Australian clubs can afford to do hopefully one day.'

It can be the small details, often overlooked by fans or outsiders, that can make a difference for players and staff in preparing for a Champions League match – knowing what facilities a hotel has, knowing what food is on offer, knowing the state of the pitch and dressing rooms. As it currently stands, Australian clubs cannot match their opponents in those aspects, but there are factors which can be better controlled to allow A-League clubs to succeed on the continental stage and to showcase the best quality Australian club football has to offer.

While planning becomes more detailed and professional and clubs, staff and players have ever-growing experiences of competing in the Asian Champions League, more can be done to shift the odds in an A-League clubs' favour. One key factor is to ensure there is sufficient time in between games to allow for as much recovery as possible, therefore allowing the best available team to be selected and reducing the risk of fatigue-related injuries.

'Western Sydney Wanderers have shown you can match it in Asia but, gee, it was difficult,' said Milicic. 'And until we make things easier for clubs, and I don't know if this is for FFA or AFC to solve, with the way our seasons are aligned, with the travelling, the size of the squads, the budget – it's going to be difficult for a club to sustain that level of competitiveness. And I think that level of competitiveness is important because we've seen, with the Wanderers' success, the exposure and the respect Australian football has got as a result, it makes it worthwhile to invest more into the Champions League.

'It's going to be very difficult to see something like this happening again. That's not to say it can't be done, but under those circumstances, what an achievement. A lot of things have to fall into place if we are to remain competitive. We need to make adjustments because the value of doing well in Asia is now there for everyone to see.'



SECURING THE FUTURE OF THE WOMEN'S GAME

RICHARD PARKIN

THE HISTORY OF WOMEN'S FOOTBALL IN AUSTRALIA IS THE history of champions. The women and men in eras past who pushed, strived and agitated around the central basic notion that elite players be regarded as such irrespective of gender. As football historians Roy Hay and Bill Murray highlight this was not always an easy path.

For much of the period since the 1880s relations between the women's and men's games at the institutional level have been antagonistic, at least on the part of the male controllers of the game. Medical and physiological arguments were used to hinder women's participation. There were chauvinist fears that women might bring the game into disrepute or that they might use playing a male sport as part of a broader campaign for social, political and economic equality. Women were to be restricted to assistance with fund raising, serving food in canteens, and acting as volunteers in the running of clubs. They could also be decorative around the clubs and associations by taking part in beauty pageants and dances.

One such early champion was Elaine Watson. A totemic figure in the pioneering days of women's soccer, she was awarded an Order of Australia Medal in 1993 for her services to the sport. So little is written about this era – a time when buoyed by second-wave feminism, pioneers around the world began to establish their own associations and leagues and to push FIFA for a Women's World Cup. Filling this void, and one of the few books detailing this period in Australia is Watson's own – *Australian Women's Soccer: The First Twenty Years*.

Charting the first National Women's Soccer Championship in August 1974 between five participants, little more than clubs masquerading as states, to the foundation of the Australian Women's Soccer Association (AWSA), to the first national team tour in 1978 – Watson's book details the emergence from amateurism and the first roots of semi-professionalism in the sport. From an era where the first Matildas captain was the wife of the first Matildas coach, to a time when thousands of female players competed for hundreds of clubs, in leagues around the nation.

Signing off after twenty years of tireless involvement, Watson concluded,

In 20 years the AWSA has moved to a position where it administers an internationally recognised sport; effectively and efficiently manages women's football in Australia with a strategic development plan; has a large playing base; and has a strongly established national and international competition.

It's an important contribution amid a wider context of neglect. Yet tellingly, despite significant progress in the women's game – run predominantly by women, for women – the relationship with the guardians of the men's game, the Australian Soccer Federation, remained testy at best. With the formation of the AWSA in 1974 came the question of how best the two peak organisations would interact. As Watson accounts, 'the fact that AWSA affiliation to

the ASF has never been formally ratified says much about the interactions between the two organisations over the next 20 years'. It's a stark indictment of the persistent rancour and non-cooperation that dominated during a period that should have been heralded as groundbreaking.

With the release of the Crawford Report in 2003 football in Australia had the opportunity to reset; to bury the grievances and dysfunction of previous administrations and to build afresh. As one of the experts consulted concluded, 'There is little evidence that individuals within Soccer Australia and some of its member associations are committed to changing the status quo in order to facilitate gender equity and embrace diversity in the future'.

The report called for the amalgamation of the myriad profession and amateur men's and women's state and territory associations, and with the 'stick' of combined state and federal government support ushered amalgamation through, at the risk of total funding withdrawal. But with the marriage being to a large extent forced, it remains to be seen whether genuine love has yet blossomed between its constituent parts; and indeed the question of administration remains a thorny issue in the W-League era.

As an administrator with almost four decades experience, the CEO of Capital Football, Heather Reid, is another colossus of women's football in Australia. Working closely with Watson as an early team leader for the side then known as the 'Female Socceroos' and eventually as head of AWSA, Reid remembers how bad things were in the early days.

'The established federations at the time didn't really know how to cope with women's participation in the game,' Reid told *Leopold Method*. 'Many of them either saw women's football as some kind of a novelty, or they saw it as a threat – an unwanted demand on money, access to grounds, referees etc. In that context, without the right support and recognition, people went off therefore and started their own associations.'

And while on occasion a vocal critic of perceived administrative shortcomings in the present era, Reid notes the improvements today, in large part due to the ceaseless efforts of advocates like herself.

‘Up until [the ABC’s decision to cease its broadcast of the W-League], I would have said the state of the women’s game was very healthy, much better than where it was some years ago. Everything in our High Performance Program includes girls – we don’t have conversations any more about just boy’s football – it’s boy and girls football – it’s the same, wherever possible. Even at FFA level, I notice the language is much more inclusive – they’re talking about the Socceroos *and* Matildas, A-League *and* W-League; but, the funding and the resources are still chalk and cheese.’

A cursory glance at the numbers confirms this last observation. Whereas broadcast rights pour almost \$2.5 million into the coffers of A-League clubs, W-League league clubs receive nothing from a broadcast arrangement paid for in part by FFA itself. While a salary cap of \$2.55 million exists for the A-League, the equivalent in the W-League is \$150,000 – although this is three times the amount team managers report is actually utilised. And while A-League clubs operate on a budget of between \$7.5-10 million, the entire outlay for a W-League team is between \$150,000 and \$200,000; with even Youth League teams enjoying allocations of up to \$400,000 per season. For the players, this translates to little more than pocket money, with contracts for a full season ranging between \$100 and \$6,000 for full internationals. For the price of one A-League minimum wager (\$50,000) you can pay for an entire 23 player W-League squad; where even those that represent their country are still working part or full-time to pursue the sport they love.

Since ‘Year-Zero’ of the Crawford Report, FFA’s preferred model for integration of men’s and women’s football is under the ‘One Club’ or ‘Super Club’ approach – elite men’s, women’s, youth and

eventually even futsal teams under the one consistent branding with the one central administration, run through the existing A-League structure. It's a vision designed to streamline backroom administrations, in the process giving the women's game access to the established corporate partnerships of their male counterparts, and expanding the 'reach' of the women's game by connecting it to established A-League fans, under one consistent and recognised club 'brand'.

'We started the A-League and W-League brands as one,' FFA's Head of Community and Women's Football, Emma Highwood explained to *Leopold Method*. 'Our preference is that this does really provide that opportunity to grow the women's game and cross promotion. So we would like to see that transition over to the A-League [clubs] going forward.'

With access to superior resources, corporate opportunities and more direct access to national and international peak administrative bodies, it appears the obvious way forward as the women's game reaches a new level of maturity. Yet take the pulse of the W-League presently and you'll find that only three of the current eight W-League teams – Brisbane Roar, Sydney FC and Western Sydney Wanderers – exist under the preferred One Club model, with the remaining five a hodgepodge of joint club and federation run or federation-only run; with teams across all three categories still working through uneasy or even fractious relations between various stakeholders.

During the difficult teething stages of the A-League, with owners primarily focused on overall financial stability and sustainability the financial burden that W-League teams represented became a stumbling block for many. 'In reality, most of the A-League clubs didn't want anything to do with the women's teams,' said Reid. 'So right from the very start the W-League teams were being run by member federations, with support from the institutes and the academies.'

It's a scenario familiar to the CEO of Football West, Peter Hugg, whose federation stepped in to fill the void following a dispute

between then Perth Glory owners and FFA. With resources already stretched due to their commitments in youth, community, women's and futsal leagues across the state, Hugg 'robbed Peter to pay Paul' to find the \$150,000 necessary to keep the Glory in the W-League.

With the state and territory federation often playing the role of 'owner of last resort', the outcomes haven't always been as successful. In 2010 after just two seasons the Central Coast Mariners W-League team folded amid significant acrimony following the A-League club and Football NSW's refusal to continue funding the operation. Despite running a successful W-League team being a condition of the original A-League licences it was an option few owners decided to take up, and given the precarious overall state of club finances and the collapse of clubs such as Gold Coast United and North Queensland Fury, one that FFA elected not to enforce.

As seen so often in the history of women's football in Australia, often the difference between some of the early W-League sides faltering, folding or flourishing came down to the will of individual champions. 'In a lot of these cases, it relies on head coaches to make it happen,' said Reid. 'Sydney FC women's was largely successful because of the backroom support from Alen Stajcic as head coach, but also Stefan Kamasz. So Sydney FC as an A-League club is putting more into the women's team and you can see that they're doing okay, but they're still nowhere near equitable – I'm not saying equal – but equitable resourcing.'

For Peter Hugg, also a former Chief Executive of the Australian Women's Soccer Association, the decision to champion women's football is one of simple philosophy. 'Owners who see the big picture, who see all players as elite professional players will see that they serve a fundamental role in promoting the club to the community,' he said. 'It's a question of philosophy – you shouldn't have to pigeonhole "men's soccer" or "women's soccer" – it's just football. At Perth Glory we consider all our players as elite athletes, as Perth Glory players first and foremost.'

Whether existing A-League owners are magnanimous or prescient enough to see likewise however remains one of the major stumbling blocks for the ongoing viability of the women's game. As Western Australia experiences a football 'West-naissance' – premiers in the W-League, finalists in the FFA Cup, and riding high both in the A-League and Youth League – Hugg is hopeful of building more positive collaboration between federation and club, having negotiated a deal for the 2014 season in which the club Perth Glory paid a portion of the funding for the W-League team that bore its name and brand.

For advocates of women's football such as the editor of *The Women's Game* website, Ann Odong, the push for the women's game to come under the administrative control of the men's A-League clubs, given a chequered history of success, gives rise to significant concerns and comes as a seeming rebuke to the progress women's only administrators had made over previous decades.

'The main focus of the A-League clubs is the financial viability of the A-League clubs,' Odong told *Leopold Method*. 'That's their bottom line. So whatever time, whatever resources they have left over, well that goes to the women's sides.'

It's a view borne out by some seemingly embarrassing oversights made regarding the women's game, from both FFA and A-League clubs. In November, with the Perth Glory women's team on the cusp of winning their first ever Premiership, local journalists quizzed the coach and players on whether there would be a trophy for the team to hold aloft for their expectant fans. Amid confusion and bemusement it transpired that there wouldn't be. Two days later, the side held aloft their first silverware in a decade – bought and provided by the state federation. As some quipped at the time, when it comes to women's football in Australia it's still a case of 'bring your own plate'.

When the issue is raised with FFA's Emma Highwood, she bristles slightly before assuring me that the matter has been resolved and an official premier's plate will be awarded at the season's conclusion. With Highwood only freshly in her new role,

no fingers are pointed at her, but it's certainly not a good look for the governing body that it's taken seven years for something as simple and symbolic as a premier's trophy to materialise.

In the newly launched A-League shop website you can find women's cuts of the A-League jerseys, but not W-League jerseys. When supporters of Sydney FC's women's team set up their own twitter account they were admonished by club officials for not supporting the official Sydney FC account – despite that account referencing only the men's team in its bio. That was subsequently rectified, but at least one A-League administered account still fails to reference the existence of its W-League team. Minor cosmetic details perhaps, but ones that add fuel to the narrative of 'women's football as afterthought' under the One Club model.

More significant than brand-related teething problems however are questions of money, and those like Odong that shell out good coin to see their side, want certainty that under the centralised model funds are being quarantined for the development of the women's game.

'One of the consternations with women's fans, and it's one of my concerns, is that if you are generating revenue, and generating memberships, which pot is it going into, and who's getting the benefit of that pot? So if it's going into your general revenue, and being circulated throughout the club, make no mistake this often comes back disproportionately to the women's team. If however you're putting it into a women's only fund, and using that to run the club, then with a club like Canberra United, this goes back to the team, this enables them to use a higher percentage of their salary cap and this translates directly into on-field success.'

In Canberra United, many find a welcome counterpoint to the One Club approach. As the only W-League club without an A-League equivalent it's certainly a unique case study. With the W-League team as the flagship team for the federation, Capital Football has been able to garner a level of support the envy of its rivals. As the

nation's capital, Canberra is home to a myriad of national sporting bureaucracies, teeming with apparatchiks with their hands firmly on the levers of territory or federal funding. Across the summer hiatus, without the Raiders, Brumbies and miscellaneous other codes Canberra United get the clear air that clubs in the congested sporting marketplaces of Melbourne or Sydney could only dream about, with players regularly interviewed in local and territory media.

With \$330,000 to spend – roughly a third from the territory government and FFA, a third from corporate sponsors, and a third from the state federation, Capital Football – Canberra United, due to the not inconsequential efforts and connections of CEO Heather Reid, has a budget of almost twice some of its competitors.

Walking past the Canberra United team office you are reminded however that even at the W-League's most financially viable club there is no extravagant largess. It's a small room in a demountable building nestled at the back of AIS facilities. The sign out the front says 'Archery', a reminder of the halcyon days of a sport now slumped below women's football in the institutional pecking order. Behind the desk where the Head Coach and Assistant sit are three airing racks, holding the squad's freshly laundered jerseys, shorts and socks. 'Liz [Head Coach Liesbeth Migchelsen] washes those herself,' Reid points out. It's a hands-on approach by the Dutch international, taking *totaal voetbal* to a new level.

Other chief executives such as Peter Hugg inform me that the success on Canberra United relies on 'champions' such as Heather Reid, but it's a position brusquely rejected by Reid herself. 'People probably think that Canberra United is successful because of me, but I think that it is an institutional thing,' she said.

With Canberra United the highest team within the Capital Football pyramid, the focus on the W-League side to attain success is undiluted. 'There's staff buy-in for running the team,' said Reid. 'At Canberra, our job descriptions are inclusive of some role for Canberra United. We did a management review at the end of 2012, and even though we'd been running Canberra United for several

years it was just by default that the Event Manager did certain things for Canberra United over the summer. Now that's enshrined, and in the summer our Junior League Manager transitions to become the Membership and Merchandise Manager for Canberra United; with the Media Manager always being involved, of course.'

Rather than the will of a lone champion, Canberra United represents the internalising of a collective, institutional will to succeed. And while Reid's eventual retirement will leave a considerable absence, her legacy will be an organisation that continues to make key strides without her.

It's a lesson learned well at the local level. Regarded by many as the benchmark for grassroots administration of the women's game, North West Sydney Women's Football (NWSWF), is a body run exclusively for women's teams. Formed in 1981, NWSWF trod a path similar to the AWSA, founded in protest and reaction against the poor treatment of women's football, marginalised and denied access to grounds and facilities by administrators of the men's game.

With its own handful of champions – women like Jeanette Jones, now a Director on the Board of Football NSW, and former Matilda and Technical Director Leigh Wardell – the association has progressed to its current status catering to 24 clubs and over 2,500 female players, with its elite team North West Sydney Koalas gaining great success in the NPL NSW Women's first division. Kim Schaefer, a former Matildas goalkeeper and current Director on the NWSWF Board, has had almost two decades of involvement with NWSWF in a variety of roles, as President, as Technical Director, and for her, more important than elite success is the dedication the association has in developing women and girls across various levels in the game.

'We can concentrate on the development of female players, because that's our priority as a female-only association,' Schaefer told *Leopold Method*. 'We can put our resources, our Technical

Director into that, either at the elite or grassroots level. We can put our best coaches on to women's team, something that doesn't always happen in other associations.'

With their focus exclusively on girls and women's development, rather than awaiting the roll out of strategic plans from FFA or Football NSW, NWSWF has even identified gaps in development pathways, implementing their own informal Skills Acquisition Program for girls aged 8-11, linking this to the elite Koala's program from under-12's up, with a curriculum-aligned playing philosophy being embedded consistently across the age groups.

It's the everyday benefits of team participation at any level that fuel Schaefer's passion for her involvement in the NWSWF Association. As the daughter of the 1974 World Cup defender, National Soccer League coach and Hall of Fame inductee Manfred Schaefer, Kim grew up infused with a love for football and embodied with a talent for it, she jokes, that largely bypassed her brother. Born in a Prussian town so far East it's now contemporary Russia, her father emigrated post-World War II to Australia as a young boy, and Kim is mindful of the instant friendship networks and connection soccer gave her father. For her, women's only teams, especially at the younger ages, provide stability to develop not just as a player, but as a person.

'As you grow up, playing with the same group of girls, it gives you the confidence and self-esteem to progress and develop. Girls that play in mixed teams don't anyways develop the confidence to acquire skills like taking a player on, but also if they are having to move or change their team each year based on availability, they're also cutting those important friendships.'

It's a point that resonates with a young girl, who grew up between Adelaide, Melbourne and Sydney, following her father as he attempted to eke out a living in football, in an era of few jobs and even fewer resources. And while Schaefer remembers the dark days when women's teams relied on comically oversized XL

training kits – the surplus stock for the men’s teams – she is quick to emphasise the much more positive nature of relationships with men’s associations, local councils and the state administration today.

‘We now have an excellent partnership with Gladesville-Hornsby Association, we work closely with their Technical Director, and some of our girls play in their competitions – we have access to fields and referee coverage of over 90% – we’ve come a long way,’ she said. ‘We’ve also had a lot of correspondence with the FFA, I think the strategic plan is really beginning to filter down to grassroots level, they’ve been very supportive in helping all that information get out to coaches and players at grassroots level.’

It doesn’t hurt that Moya Dodd, a former Matildas teammate, and FFA Board member is still an active player within the Association, helping lines of communication to the upper echelons remain open. It’s a testament to the institutionalised knowledge and passion for the game inside the NWSWF set up and Schaefer is adamant that getting former players in key leadership positions can play a critical role in continuing to develop the women’s game.

‘We have three women in leadership positions on our board, and if other associations can take a holistic approach – think, what the men get, the women get – then that’s a really important formula – and more and more other associations are starting to do that.’

With a body of volunteers all focused on the same goal, all pulling together to achieve the same outcomes, it’s easy to see the benefits of an administrative structure that focuses solely on developing women and girls as players. But is such an approach still the best way forward for the women’s game today?

To scale this up to the elite level involves a degree of resources simply not currently available to women’s football, which again raises the question of whether there exists a silver bullet for the challenges of developing women’s football’s top

domestic competition. For advocates like Odong, a hybrid model, a combination of the state federations with their institutional knowledge, and the A-League clubs with their financial clout represents the best way forward.

‘The state federations should run [W-League clubs], but the A-League sides should be expected to provide a portion of the funding,’ Odong said. ‘While they may not at the moment be getting a lot of revenue from the women’s team, they engender a lot of good will and brand value. Look at Sydney FC, when they were losing coaches and their men’s team was struggling, as a club, they could still point to silverware, thanks to the success of their women.’

‘Philosophically it also makes sense [for the federations to be involved]; if the aim of the W-League is to provide us with top-class Matildas, then your pathways have to be set up that way – so your grassroots girls teams are done by the federations, they also do the representative squads, the national training centre squads, so it just works – you go from representatives, to W-League, to national side in a linear, consistent fashion.’

The issue of consistent development pathways is a critical concern for Peter Hugg as well, but having borne the brunt of the costs for the Perth Glory W-League side in recent seasons, he worries that state federations will be spread too thin if asked to continue in such a role.

‘The role of the member federations should be one of a supporting mechanism – we should be focusing on community development, club development. Elite player development is an expensive operation, with travel, accommodation, and equipment costs – and there’s no question that other aspects of community development have suffered. If the A-League clubs step in, then we can focus on our rank and file members, on everything else that underpins the peak of the triangle.’

As always though, the devil appears to be in the detail. With an often fraught history of collaboration between A-League clubs and state federations when it comes to supporting the elite women's competition, some like Reid are asking for FFA to clearly articulate and formalise the roles and responsibilities of each group.

'We've been wanting this for over 12 months – especially around the A-League club's role in schools and academies, and all the underpinning programs, compared with what the federations are doing, because we're all treading on each other's toes,' said Reid. 'From what I hear from other federations the challenges they have are quite significant, so I'm quite glad we don't have an A-League club.'

It's a call that's been heeded by FFA who is presently undergoing a review of the W-League process, and in an effort to provide much-needed stability to the competition – especially in the light of the recent collapse of a free-to-air broadcasting arrangement – has called on the A-League clubs or member federations that are presently running W-League sides to commit to a three-year term, to be reviewed at the conclusion of the 2017-18 season.

While FFA's expressed preference is for the One Club model, Highwood has ruled out placing deadlines for a uniform transition, looking to treat each existing club on a case-by-case basis. It's a response in part necessitated by the unique circumstances of Canberra United and the complicated dynamics of partial or non-existent collaboration surround the various W-League clubs, but it also opens the door for potential expansions in locations that don't presently have A-League clubs, such as in Northern Queensland or South Coast NSW.

'The FFA isn't set fast on it either way [whether One Club or federation run],' said Highwood. 'For us we just want the right teams in the W-League; the Canberra model has been a good one, but it works because they're the main professional team in that market. In terms of other pockets of Australia, we'll be open, potentially, but at this stage we're just working through with the A-League clubs where they stand.'

The talks may be lengthy or protracted, but with a new A-League broadcasting deal said to potentially double the existing revenue, FFA may find itself in a considerably better negotiating position than when individual clubs were folding and the viability of the entire league were in question. And while even the presence of protracted talks is by far an improvement on the historical absence of true negotiation, for many the proof of progress relies in the concrete outcomes, not just the discussions.

Ahead of the 2011 Women's World Cup, FIFA supremo Sepp Blatter proclaimed to the world's media that 'the future of football is feminine'. It was a grand vision designed to highlight the peak body's commitment to expanding and developing women's football, but one met with some cynicism by advocates of the women's game, many still mindful of his earlier utterance that elite female players should 'wear tighter shorts and low cut shirts' if they wanted their sport to attract greater audiences.

Prominent supporters of women's football have subsequently questioned whether FIFA has demonstrated since this lofty proclamation to be more interested in marketing men's football to female consumers, rather than developing female participation in the sport. It's a cautionary tale illustrating the all too frequent divide between rhetoric and action that has dogged the development of women's football, still plagued by the institutionalised gender biases pervasive among wider society, and in part explains the scepticism with which any 'new dawn' in women's football in Australia has traditionally been met.

But with the appointment of Highwood as Head of Community and Women's Football, a new Marketing Manager for Women's Football, the formulation of the Women's Football Strategic Plan, and in securing \$536,000 from FIFA for grassroots development officers focusing on women and girl's participation, the FFA under David Gallop can argue it has demonstrated sufficient inclination to grow women's football to warrant community support.

At the recent youth development tournament held at the Australian Institute for Sport I spoke to several federation Chief Executives and Technical Directors about the forthcoming FFA Whole of Football Plan, and the work that had been undertaken therein. The response was cautiously positive, but for one Technical Director, it represented but more of the same: ‘It’s one thing to have nice plans, and pathways etc – but where are the resources?’

When I subsequently put the question to Highwood, her voice betrays an undercurrent of frustration. ‘We’re in a really good position with the women’s game, and people do need to be slightly patient with us,’ she said. ‘Everything starts with the strategy, and what we launched last year was the first part of our strategy which provided the direction for the game. We started setting out some key goals for what’s ahead for the women’s game and that then helps the FFA to unlock some more funding. Rather than saying “we want some more money for the women’s game”, we can say “this is specifically what we want it for and how it helps us to grow; so this is the kind of bigger picture that we’re working on.”’

With a background working in and passion for women’s football, nobody would suggest that Highwood isn’t working her hardest to deliver real gains for the women’s game. But as Reid – so often the lone voice for women’s football in a room full of men – would attest, whether true momentum generates depends upon whether FFA and their A-League club owner partners develops and retains the kind of institutional will for success that organisations such as Canberra United and the North West Sydney Women’s Football Association have in fighting for the women’s game.

The first test will be securing a new television broadcast arrangement that ensures women’s football remains on television screens. A second challenge will be locking A-League clubs and federations into providing the stability of a three-year commitment to existing W-League squads. And a third, perhaps to entice A-League owners to show leadership in supporting women’s football by quarantining a portion of any new incomes garnered

under an enhanced A-League broadcast rights deal, explicitly for their women's teams.

Contemplating the not insubstantial roadblocks ahead, Reid remains wistful. Having worked through the darker days when women's soccer was discouraged and advocates viewed as 'pests', she remains optimistic about the path forward. 'I'm relatively hopeful about the future of the women's game,' she said. 'I think we've come a long way.' It's a succinct summary of a long struggle, with many more chapters still to write.



PATHWAYS: JAPAN'S PURSUIT OF TECHNICAL EXCELLENCE

SCOTT MCINTYRE

IT'S NOT UNTIL MUCH LATER THAT YOU REALISE IT BUT OFTEN the first impressions you take from visiting a new country are the ones that remain most powerful. Over the past decade or so I've spent a lot of time travelling across Asia and those initial flourishes are still some of the strongest memories I have. The battered and torn old taxi in Kolkata, the cows lumbering about in the middle of the road from Tribhuvan airport into central Kathmandu and sitting, in tropical heat, with legs dangling out an open door on the coastal train – passing through the same towns that were washed away by a massive tsunami in 2004 – from Colombo to Galle in southern Sri Lanka.

In Japan that moment came at the turn of the century; landing at Narita Airport in a rural stretch of farmland an hour north-west of Tokyo and then hurtling through the veins of a city of more than 20 million to a temporary residence at the southern tip of its vast expanse. Tokyo is unlike many other metropolitan areas of similar size. Due to the regular threat of earthquakes, it is built out rather than up. The effect is that it pushes everything closer, smaller, tighter – much like the famous Japanese Bonsai tree.

That first journey I spent glued to the window, watching this new city unfold but realising immediately the ingenuity that had sprung from necessity – the maximisation of space and the very utility of it. Carparks with just enough room for three or four vehicles parked side-by-side built upwards, perhaps four or five stories, and with a kind of elevator on which they would come down from one level to another – the whole thing no bigger than a corner convenience store. Shops and living spaces built into the unlikeliest of small areas and the golf or baseball training fields that featured huge, storey-high nets, which meant balls could be driven or hit with fury and held no risk to the surrounding structures.

There are several large parklands in and around central Tokyo but in the vast bulk of the suburban reaches what counts as ‘parkland’ is generally a small plot of ground, typically around 50 x 50 metres that has at one end some kind of children’s play equipment and then an open sandy gravel area. This was my introduction to football in Japan – kids playing after school or on weekends in these incredibly small spaces, a kind of enforced outdoors futsal match. Often there would be a number of children practising keepy-uppys, dribbling, shooting and taking free kicks towards a marked spot on a wall. They would do this for hours on end and it stands out as one of the primary reasons why so many Japanese players are wonderful dead-ball exponents. Just look at two of the goals scored by Japan against Denmark at the 2010 FIFA World Cup, the first by Keisuke Honda, the second by Yasuhito Endo. Both wonderful free kicks, they were the goals that secured Japan’s passage to the knockout stage for just the second time – an expression of technique honed over countless hours from childhood and executed under the tightest of pressure.

A couple of weeks after my arrival in Tokyo in 2000 I noticed a group of schoolkids playing regular evening matches in a park across the road from where I lived with several other foreign

residents. It was immediately obvious that they 'could play' but being older and physically stronger there was no doubt in our minds when we – a ragtag collection from Australia, England, America and Canada – challenged them to a match what the outcome would be. We'd batter 'em, as the English like to say.

It couldn't have been further from the truth – this group of kids in their early high school years ran rings around, through and past us. While naturally there were some among their group which stood out, there were also common themes. All were comfortable using either foot, capable of finding a pass in even the smallest of spaces and perfectly attuned to the movement of their teammates. It was an eye-opening, first-hand, introduction to the technique of this nation – one that is generally regarded as among the best in Asia. How did it come about in such a short space of time? Though the answer is neither immediately obvious, simple in explanation or even universally agreed upon there are several unifying themes.

SENSHUKEN – THE IMPORTANCE OF HIGH SCHOOL FOOTBALL

It's generally accepted that the origins of the game in Japan can be traced to a club in Kobe, just outside of Osaka. The Kobe Regatta & Athletic Club was formed in 1870 by a group of foreign residents, but it wasn't until almost half a century later that football started to expand rapidly, particularly in schools and universities but also among a handful of newly formed amateur clubs which sprung up across the country.

One of those, Tokyo Shukyu-dan, founded in 1917, still exists today and plays in the local amateur leagues. Although no longer involved in the professional game their place in Japanese football folklore is assured as their name is stamped as the first ever Emperor's Cup champion. In 1921 (the same year the Japanese Football Association was founded) the new cup-style tournament was formed to find a 'national' champion and for all bar a few war-interrupted years it still continues today. In December 2014 Gamba

Osaka defeated second-division Montedio Yamagata to win the 94th edition of the tournament.

It is one of the oldest continuous cup competitions anywhere in the world and has always been viewed as one of the major box-office attractions of the Japanese domestic season. Even earlier than that though, in 1917, the *Senshuken* was first played. A tournament for high school sides throughout the country, the 93rd edition was completed in January 2015 and from the post-war years onwards this has been a highlight of the local football calendar. The final stages of the competition bring together the top school teams from each prefecture and are played over a two week period in the Tokyo area at the beginning of each year. The matches are highlighted by raucous, American college style crowds with school cheerleaders, brass bands and rhythmic songs that often borrow more from baseball traditions than football ones.

The final, traditionally played at Tokyo's Olympic Stadium, is regularly a sell-out and matches from the final stage onwards are broadcast live on national television. As autumn suddenly gives way to colder weather at the beginning of December, when the final 48 schools are decided, there are several glossy magazines on sale previewing the event that is also known as the 'Winter Classic'. They come complete with tactical lineups, player photos and profiles as well as regional qualifying and historical records. All this for a high school football tournament.

Naturally the vast majority of players in the *Senshuken* are Japanese. Occasionally, however, there are students from foreign backgrounds who also reach the top in a country not known for its multiculturalism. New Zealand-born international Michael Fitzgerald attended Tokyo's highly regarded Seiritsu Gakuen from 2005-2007 and is now a key part of top-flight J.League club Albirex Niigata. In the current crop of aspiring talents at Seiritsu there are two Australian players – Jeremy Carpenter and Connor O'Toole. These two young men are following in a line of young

Australian players heading to Japan, the most famous graduate being Socceroos left back, Jason Davidson.

Jason's father, Alan, played 79 times for the Socceroos and so it was perhaps natural that Jason would also make his way into the professional game. Less usual, however, was the avenue he took to get there. With a grandmother hailing from Hiroshima it was decided that Jason would move to Tokyo at the age of 15 and attend Seiritsu – a school famed for its football program.

'There is a bonus that I get coming to Japan and attending Seiritsu and that is while I am pursuing my dream of becoming a pro soccer player, I can also get an education,' Jason told the school's website back in 2006. 'My dad and mum always told me that without an education you will never get anywhere in this world. This is why Seiritsu is a very unique high school. There is no school that I know of in Australia that does this kind of thing.'

It wasn't only the education that attracted the Davidsons to the Japanese high school. According to Jason, the focus on technical excellence was a major draw card. The sheer amount of time spent with the ball came as a shock.

'It was very hard for me at the start to adapt to the soccer over here in Japan because they were so fit and that's because the team trains five times a week and plays multiple games on Saturday and Sunday. This is a totally different schedule to back home in Australia. In Australia I would only train two days a week and play a game on Sunday. That's why your soccer improves dramatically here. I think my soccer has improved because the Seiritsu coaching staff are excellent coaches – most of them were pro soccer players so they know what they are talking about. The second reason is because I am just simply training triple of what I was doing back home in Australia.'

Prior to the formation of the J.League the high school system was responsible for much of the technical training and development of players who would eventually filter through into the various

national teams. While in recent years the J.League youth clubs are now increasingly the preferred avenue for the most talented school-age players looking to become professionals, for those that fail to make the cut both the high school and university systems provide a vital fall-back option. There are several major stars – former Celtic midfielder Shunsuke Nakamura and current AC Milan playmaker Keisuke Honda are two examples – that left or were cut from J.League youth clubs and made their names in the high school system.

In a country like Australia where school-age football is poorly organised and national competitions virtually non-existent, it can be difficult to understand the scale and popularity of Japan's high school programs. Though naturally tactical proclivities or training methods vary depending on the experience or approach of individual coaches, several institutions have specific, defined, playing styles that are recognised nationwide. Mention the Yasu School from Shiga Prefecture and every football fan in the country immediately knows the way they play. The institution that produced current national team player and Bundesliga star Takashi Inui is renowned for its short passing, possession style game that is known simply as 'sexy football'. The school has made a number of slick videos highlighting their footballing philosophy that have become big hits on YouTube.

Keiji Yamamoto, the school's long-time coach, is known as something of a Bielsa-esque football didactic and pens a regular column in Japanese magazine *Sports Hihou*. In 2014, Yamamoto wrote about his ideal development for school-age footballers in Japan.

I have some ideals on football that I think are fundamental and that's what we work on every single day, constantly and intensively. Firstly, our approach has to involve a commitment to passing football, attacking football. This notion of not knowing a pass and working backwards I strongly disagree with. As soon as we gain possession,

we must go, like an arrow toward the goal and if we lose it we will win it back again as fast as we can. Every player must have a 360-degree vision and on the pitch we don't look down to find money – we will make money. Through experience comes calmness and with that comes the ability to trust in your technique and play this style of football – I will never waver in my belief it is the right way forward – the future is not measured in days, months or years but in seconds.

In an indication of the strength of the high school system neither Yasu nor Seiritsu qualified for the finals of this year's *Senshukun*. Yet for the pair of young Australians at the latter, the high school system has provided them with a valuable opportunity to continue their footballing development at an intensive level.

'The development here is physically very tough and hard but I'm sure it will pay off in the long term,' Carpenter told *Leopold Method*. 'What I've noticed the most is the desire for physical excellence. The school has their goal as making sure that every player can complete 90 minutes without any problems so there is a lot of fitness based work. The tactical work is much more advanced in Australia but perhaps the technique and certainly the physical side of things is much stronger here.'

Carpenter has an older sister, Ellie, who is a member of the Young Matildas and played most of his junior football in his hometown of Cowra. He moved to Sydney to join Westfields Sports High and the renowned Futboltec academy run by A-League brothers Jason and Glen Trifiro. While that gave him a good grounding in many aspects of the game what shocked him the most on his arrival in Japan was the complete commitment to the group ethos.

'We actually live in a dorm at the training ground and have to commute to school, about 40 minutes away but the thing is if someone does something wrong then everyone in the group will be disciplined at the same time,' said Carpenter. 'Earlier this year we made the finals of the Inter-High [a summer version of the

Senshuken] and one of the players was just mucking around a bit when he should have been quiet at the opening ceremony. The school found out and he was punished – but so were all the other players. As a result, the punishment was we all had to shave our hair off. I wasn't too happy about that!'

CREATING A VIBRANT FOOTBALL CULTURE

Japan's high school football system is highly regarded worldwide. It's just one part of a vibrant football culture that produces well-rounded, hard working and technically accomplished players. Several of the world's leading players, including Zinedine Zidane to Alessandro Del Piero, have spoken of their childhood enjoyment derived from the long-running book and animation series *Captain Tsubasa*. The series focuses on a schoolboy who leaves his hometown to pursue the dream of becoming a professional player, and there continues to be countless imitations in a country that consumes voracious amounts of written and digital media.

Until recently there were two weekly, full-colour magazines devoted primarily to Japanese football which, along with the standard match reports and profile interviews, also feature in-depth tactical columns with many pages regularly turned over to both youth and women's football. There are also several monthly periodical magazines geared to a different audience and a visit to any bookstore across the country will reveal literally hundreds upon hundreds of different football titles. On a recent trip to Kinokunya bookstore in Shinjuku, Tokyo, I noted among the offerings the following titles: *Physical Training for Middle School Children*, *King of the Groundmove*, *Bottom-Up Team Building*, *Tactical Lessons From the World* and shelf after shelf of player biographies among which were the hidden gems, *Atsuto Uchida's Photo Book* and Kazuyoshi Miura's *55 Letters from my Family*.

There are more than half a dozen sports specific magazines and newspapers that regularly carry several pages of local football news and reports. The 'pink paper', *El Golazo*, is a football specific

newspaper published every Monday, Wednesday and Friday all year round. It focuses primarily on domestic football with regular features and reports from the various youth tournaments that take place across the nation.

Television also plays a major role in the coverage. Every match of both the top two divisions in the J.League are broadcast live as are matches from the women's Nadeshiko League and the various youth cups. There are several weekly J.League chat shows as well as exposure to a far greater range of international football than that which is available in most countries. On any given day a Japanese football fan can catch matches from England, Germany, Spain, Italy, Belgium, the Netherlands and any number of other European and South American leagues.

Most of this coverage, however, is relatively new. While both the Emperor's Cup and the *Senshukun* provided regular football in the periods before, in between and after the two World Wars and the Toyota Cup has become a headline attraction, it wasn't until 1967 that a nationwide league structure was implemented with the arrival of the Japan Soccer League in 1965. Initially launched with just the single division and expanded to a second one in 1972 the league consisted of corporate-backed teams and was organised along amateur lines. There were in the latter years of the JSL several players who were professional in all but name, a kind of 'sham-ateurism'.

As Sebastian Moffett wrote in his book, *Japanese Rules*, the JSL struggled to make any kind of meaningful impact on a Japanese public that was enamoured with baseball.

Attendance at most JSL matches was no more than a few hundred, although organizers, embarrassed by the low turnouts, routinely doubled the numbers when announcing the 'official' figures. The spectators spread themselves over several seats, where they drank beer and picked at boxes of snack food with chopsticks. They kept

one eye on the game happening on the thin brown grass below, but mostly chatted among themselves. They felt no need to get value from the matches because nearly all had received tickets free from the team owners. There were no support songs nor chants because there were no real supporters – just people who sometimes turned up after work to see a team with the same name as their employer.

Spurred by a handful of key individuals with the desire to cast off the shackles of the corporate structure, to create a more competitive national team and the prospect of bidding to host the 2002 World Cup, a push was made to launch a fully professional league. By 1992 the JSL was effectively disbanded (eventually becoming a lower-tier competition) and the following year, the J.League began. Although the initial J.League was formed almost exclusively from existing JSL sides, the clubs cast off their corporate veneer and with an emphasis on community engagement the new league made an instant impact.

The first season kicked off with 10 clubs and expanded rapidly to the point where there were 18 teams by 1998, the year before promotion and relegation to a second division began. While the early years witnessed several Japanese players become household names, much of the initial success was down to a collection of big-name foreign signings who arrived to help drive professionalism and provide the ‘star-effect’ that broadcasters and supporters were craving. Brazilians Zico (at Kashima), Careca (Kashiwa), Dunga (Jubilo) and Argentine Ramon Diaz (Yokohama Marinos) all greatly helped raise the profile and standard over those early years.

After a downturn in average attendances during the latter part of the 1990s, interest in the J.League was perhaps at its peak in the years either side of the hosting of the World Cup. It was also the first time that Japanese players started to move in large numbers to European leagues, initially with mixed results.

The man in charge of the national team from 1998 to 2002 was Philippe Troussier. The colourful Frenchman became the first coach to guide the Samurai Blue to the knockout stages of a World Cup, as well as overseeing the bulk of the country's youth teams. The 3-5-2 formation he employed was adapted by many J.League teams for years after his departure. Although he was disliked by sections of the Japanese media, the influence he had on what is described as the 'golden generation' of Japanese footballers is widely recognised.

Over the years since he left the top job in Japan, I have interviewed and had many private discussions with Troussier. We have spoken at length about the importance of instilling a mental toughness in a generation of players that already had technical excellence but lacked a desire to push themselves abroad. There are, of course, a few notable exceptions, Hidetoshi Nakata chief among them. Speaking to *Leopold Method* in December from China, where he has just accepted a three-year posting with Super League club Hangzhou, Troussier said in many aspects Japanese footballers are ahead of those in Europe – although there are some glaring weaknesses.

'For me, one of the strengths of Japanese football is the number of processes available where you can find players,' said Troussier. 'In France, for example, we don't have this good system of high school football, the serious development starts maybe at 12 or 13 in clubs or academies but in Japan even from the age of 6 the resources are fantastic. You have all these coaches who are trained with licences and the equipment available is first-class in almost every facility.'

'Then you have the quality and the attitude of Japanese people – this is true not just in football but many aspects of society where they are disciplined, they try hard and they listen. As a coach I'm like the conductor of an orchestra so to have the players immediately take in what you say is a very huge step, there is no arguing and they try to work for their partner.'

However Troussier recognises that a lack of individuality remains one of the main reasons why Japan has failed in several major tournaments at both senior and youth levels.

‘In terms of technical quality and ability I truly believe Japan is in the top three or four nations in the world but what is holding them back is a lack of individuality – of someone prepared to take risks and improvise. The players are just not selfish enough and it can lead to giving up easily; in France we say you have to shoot and miss six times, then you will score with the seventh. In Japan if they miss twice in a row they will be discouraged and give up.’

During a camp in Lebanon in 2000, Troussier went as far as encouraging players to do things in small groups or on their own. The players, however, insisted on taking the bus together as a team. ‘What I did was told the bus driver to drive for 20 minutes, then I stopped it and made them get off and find their own way back in small groups,’ explained Troussier. ‘One of the main challenges I faced was to try and break this culture of doing everything for the group.’

Etsuko Motokawa is an author who has written more than a dozen books on Japanese football – many focusing on player development. She agrees with what Troussier saw as the main problem facing Japanese footballers.

‘Twenty years ago football was not so popular in Japan and people were hungry, desperate, for information and things progressed very quickly,’ she told *Leopold Method*. ‘Now though there is, I think, less of a desire among young Japanese players. They are programmed to know what to do technically but sometimes this is not enough. Japan has failed to progress in recent youth tournaments and you see that sometimes they perform like robots in certain situations; the players are good technically but mentality is a really big problem facing Japanese football.’

Mentality remains as a major stumbling block for the modern Japanese footballer, but that has not stopped many players moving abroad to play for top European clubs. In the Bundesliga alone there are currently 13 Japanese players, and many of them are key cogs in their respective sides. Yuto Nagatomo (Inter Milan)

and Keisuke Honda are feature players at two of Europe's biggest club sides while Junya Tanaka (Sporting Lisbon), Maya Yoshida (Southampton) and Ryo Miyaichi (Arsenal, on loan at FC Twente) are also on the books on major European outfits.

This doesn't happen by accident. Japanese footballers are now well-respected and in high demand. Snide remarks about clubs only signing players for 'shirt-sales' that was often heard a decade or so ago no longer apply. The fact remains that Japan is the major exporter of players from Asia to Europe. Their technical level is often cited as the key reason for these moves. These players are all products of the Japanese development system – a multi-layered beast that includes JFA-led initiatives, J.League youth sides as well as the high school and university systems.

STREAMLINING THE DEVELOPMENT PLAN

When the J.League was launched each club was mandated to have a commitment to youth development. Beginning in 1994 the J-Youth Cup was launched as a vehicle for club sides to play matches at junior level. By the turn of the century the emphasis on youth football was further enshrined when the league insisted every current and future club must establish junior or school teams in addition to under-15 and under-18 sides and their reserve sides.

Players saw a clear progression from junior sides to the top teams, and the club model quickly became the preferred path for youngsters aiming for a professional career. Almost every club across the country now has several graduates from their youth teams that regularly feature in the senior side. Recently crowned J.League champions Gamba Osaka are one good example. Of the side that won the J1 title in December, goalkeeper Masaaki Higashiguchi, defender Daiki Niwa, midfielders Takahiro Futagawa and Shu Kurata and striker Takashi Usami all spent time at various levels of the Gamba youth setup. With every club required to have this assortment of youth teams, a model of cups and league tournaments have sprung up to support their growth but perhaps the most important move has to been to integrate both the leading club and

high school sides in the one setup. Hiromi Hara, the long-time technical director of the JFA, told *Leopold Method* this combining of elite players in both development streams is a good arrangement.

‘We decided to make the club teams and the high school teams join together to play in a youth tournament from three years ago,’ he said. ‘What we’ve found is that the J.League clubs are generally stronger but there are still a lot of good players within the high school teams. Those sides don’t want to lose to the clubs and there are good matches where together they can raise each others level.’

‘Generally the overall level is better in the clubs but many high schools tend to have one player that stands out more than others – a kind of “star” which the clubs often don’t have. The point for the JFA is that either way we get good players and it doesn’t matter from where. Honda, Nagatomo, Hasebe, they unexpectedly all came from high school.’

One player who has seen both systems up close is Mu Kanazaki; capped five times by Japan and now playing with Portimonense in Portugal. The 25-year-old attacker spent time in both the high school and J.League club systems and told *Leopold Method* he can see the merits in both systems.

‘I spent a lot of time in high school but also from the age of eight was involved with a club side,’ he said. ‘In the club structure every player is determined to get promoted into the top side so they are constantly striving to polish their individual skills and I feel this makes them better than high school players.’

‘On the other hand though the high school players have a real united focus and are aiming to win the *Senshuken* as a team, playing together so you can see the sacrifice and hard work that applies there too. Then in regional areas you might have players from both club and schools gathering together at the JFA facility so in Japan there are really so many opportunities for players to develop and progress as a player.’

Even as far as the under-13 age group there are now league and cup tournaments run along J.League lines which, as of last year, featured 49 teams in the under-14 age bracket and 120 at the under-13 level. Additionally, the league regularly runs international tours and camps for a 'J.League selection' of the best players at these age groups. At both under-15 and under-18 levels, there is a league structure and two knockout competitions played annually which means players in these age groups could play anywhere between 30-45 matches in a given year.

The Prince Takamado Cup is the league competition for the under-18 age group consisting of 10 teams (both school and J.League clubs) from the west and 10 from the eastern reaches of Japan – complete with a promotion and relegation structure. I attended the 2014 final, which was broadcast on TV and played in front of 20,000 spectators at one of the venues for the 2002 World Cup – Urawa Reds' home stadium in Saitama. It was hard to believe that the match, played between Kashiwa Reysol and champions Cerezo Osaka, was featuring a group of 16-17 year olds.

As is the case with the *Senshuken* finals the players' technical ability is, in my opinion, among the best anywhere in the world at that age level. Tactically both sides were well organised and disciplined but it was the poise on the ball, the ability to find solutions when being tightly pressed and the decision making under pressure that was a standout. This is the product of having a well-rounded, intense and deep pool of coaches and an ardent commitment to a laden training and game load.

As is the case with the high school system, in rare instances J.League clubs will look to recruit exceptional foreign players to bolster their youth teams. I had the opportunity to sit down on the outskirts of Tokyo with one such player recently to look at the different systems available to players inside of Japan and outside.

Michael Den Heijer grew up in Auckland as the son of a rugby-loving father yet resisted the temptation of the 15-man game to

make his way through a series of provincial youth teams before joining the famed Wynton Rufer academy, WYNRS, as a teenager. A series of international tours – including two to Japan – helped to hone his skills and he was a key member of the New Zealand side which participated in the 2013 under-17 World Cup. From there he was invited to trial and eventually picked up by one of the J.League's leading sides, Kashiwa Reysol. Spending the year with a club which reached the final of the national under-18 championships, the Prince Takamado Cup, Den Heijer described his time in the youth setup in Japan as invaluable.

'I feel that this is definitely the best place for my development. The pace of the game in Japan is really fast and the technical side is very high too. In New Zealand there is more emphasis on the physical aspects so my technique doesn't need to be as good as it does here; for me that's the key thing I'm developing here, just refining those technical skills.'

Den Heijer estimates he played almost 40 matches from March to December last season and his daily routine is just as intense. He lives in a dormitory with 10 other players where they are given just the one day a week off with a constant flow of training and matches – in addition to non-footballing activities.

'For me, my day starts in the morning with Japanese lessons then after lunch I'll head to the training ground. I usually try to arrive an hour early to prepare and then training runs six days a week from 4:30 until 7:00pm. There's usually another hour or so after training to have injuries looked at or get icing or whatever then we have dinner together at the club. Reysol has a couple of full-time chefs that cook for all the youth squads and they look after us really well.'

The 18 year old is hopeful of cracking the New Zealand squad for the under-20 World Cup which his home country will host later this year and believes he's getting the ideal grounding for that in Japan.

'Both the under-15 and the under-18 squads train together and in my age group I have maybe 40 kids so just the competition for places is intense. Coming from New Zealand where you go to a

team and you're straight in it's totally different here, you have to work and fight for everything.

'At Reysol we have a real emphasis on technical qualities, based a lot on the Bayern Munich and Barcelona models – a focus on possession soccer. It makes us successful as a club and me better as a player and with 40 matches or so in a season it means I'm getting double the amount of work and game-time that I would back home.'

While the J.League clubs and often the high school sides have a stranglehold on youth footballers in the major cities – especially around the Tokyo, Yokohama and Osaka/Kyoto regions for those in more rural areas the options were relatively limited. While there are several lower-tier clubs on the southernmost island of Kyushu for much of the rest of the country they are few and far between.

This is where the JFA stepped in to create a series of national training centres that serve as 'funnels' for elite talent in those regions. The JFA's vice-president and one of the founding fathers of the J.League, Kozo Tashima, told *Leopold Method* that when they were deciding on the structure of these academies they searched far and wide – including Australia. According to Tashima, the model of the Australian Institute of Sport 'had a big impact' on the JFA, who sent people to study the AIS program.

Hiromi Hara is well positioned to comment. The former national team striker has seen all angles of the Japanese football pyramid, as a player, a coach, and as a technical director. In 2015 he was appointed general-secretary of the JFA. However, it was his childhood though which made one of the biggest impacts on his football philosophy.

'I grew up in the countryside, in Tochigi, in an area and at a time when there was no professional football but lots of baseball,' he told *Leopold Method*. 'I spent my days watching some players in a junior high school playing football and I was so frustrated that I couldn't play so one day I tried to pick the ball up from them and

even though I was younger they eventually invited me to play in their team.'

Describing his frustration at the lack of opportunities in rural areas, when Hara progressed all the way to helming the nation's technical development programs he knew that coach education and youth development were key cogs in the development of young Japanese players. He credits German coach Dettmar Cramer as having a 'big impact' on Japanese football with his innovative philosophy and training methods.

'For a long time our base was a German one but then some guys came from France and so on. We search for what suits Japanese footballers and sometimes we listen to people from England, Germany or Spain to take some aspects and advice – we take the best points that are good for Japanese people but ultimately we decided to do things our way. That means, and this is especially true for women, that we should create players with good technique, players that are comfortable with the left foot or right and comfortable on the ball.'

Hara believes children playing small sided games helps to develop footballers who are capable of playing at high speed, with short passing and competent in one-on-one situations. 'In the big cities you can still see young players just playing for the enjoyment of the game,' he said. 'Kids on their lunch break or after school playing 2-on-2 or 3-on-3, even on the edge of Tokyo you see this.'

Perhaps the biggest problem facing the JFA and the J.League is what to do with such a large pool of players (there are now 53 clubs across the three divisions) so Hara and the JFA are now supporting plans to allow clubs to field 'reserve' sides in the recently created, semi-professional J3, as another way of maximising the opportunities of players in the 18-20 age group to get regular game time.

'This year we introduced the under-22 national team to play in the J3 league and we will expand this with reserve teams playing in coming years because these players, from 18-20, are the ones that often miss out. These players at such a key age must be playing a lot of minutes.'

The fact that too many players has become a problem illustrates what Hara and others view as perhaps *the* main strength of the Japanese development model – coach education. The JFA is, along with the FFA, one of only two Asian federations able to implement and run their own coaching courses and the sheer number of licensed coaches in Japan is staggering.

Beginning in the early 1970s the JFA began to implement intensive coaching courses which led to the establishment of a professional ('S') licence in 1992 and the aim in the early 1990s to train almost 10,000 youth coaches. These numbers have been wildly exceeded and Hara estimates there are now more than 10,000 coaches who hold the 'S' licence – a document on par with the AFC's Pro Licence. Below this the numbers have ballooned out to more than 30,000 qualified A, B, C coaches at each of those levels and for grassroots instructors the number is significantly higher. Motokawa says this is a key reason why Japan produces so many technically proficient players.

'Coaching is the big part of the story; even those who just want to hold or teach at the grassroots level try to obtain higher licenses. So, you might have someone whose focus is on youth development at the "golden age" (10-12) but they have studied and got the C, B, A or even the S Licence so they understand how the whole program aims to work from step to step. They can see the overall picture.'

This is the aim for all who work in youth development in Japan and the results have been clear and consistent. As a nation Japan constantly produces fantastic, technically accomplished footballers – whether this is able to be replicated in cultures with other social norms is a topic for further debate. Yet, as the struggles of the Japanese national team on a global stage have shown, there are often more than just technical aspects that need to be developed. This, in a nation whose governing body has a 100-year plan for success, is the next challenge. Perhaps in a couple of decades time those visiting this land will be able to say they've arrived in the first Asian nation to have won a World Cup.



SLEEPING WITH THE ENEMY: COLLINGWOOD AND CARLTON IN THE NSL

VINCE RUGARI

IT'S ALMOST IMPOSSIBLE TO IMAGINE WHAT MELBOURNE WOULD be like without Australian Rules football. Melburnians laud their city as the sporting capital of the world, and with a calendar that boasts events like the Australian Open, the Boxing Day Test match and the Melbourne Cup, it's hard to argue. But truly, there's only one sport that is woven into the very fabric of the city. Australian Rules football is omnipresent; the metronome to which Melbourne's cultural circadian rhythms are set. Grab a coffee and the barista will ask for your tips. Hop in a taxi and the driver will ask for your take on the AFL talking point of the day. Club loyalties are passed down family lines, and club colours are worn indiscriminately – not just to and from the game, but casually during the week as well, like a badge of pride.

Other sports can only dream of the AFL's ubiquity in Melbourne – and indeed, for a few crazy years, soccer did. Shockwaves were sent through Australian sport when on March 9, 1996, Soccer Australia chairman David Hill announced two new teams would be joining the National Soccer League – Collingwood Warriors and Carlton Soccer Club. Both were bold new entities that sought to

leverage the popularity of two of Victoria's biggest AFL clubs to give the floundering round-ball game the legitimacy it so desperately sought. The Warriors were ostensibly a joint-venture between Melbourne's pre-eminent AFL powerhouse, the Collingwood Football Club, and Heidelberg United, a founding member of the NSL which had suddenly found itself excluded from the national competition and was seeking a way back in. Carlton SC, on the other hand, was a project steered by a man with a vision and an inventive board from the AFL club that was backing him all the way.

To describe Australian Rules and soccer as strange bedfellows doesn't even begin to explain their testy relationship. History is littered with instances of open warfare between the self-proclaimed indigenous code and the one belittled as a foreign curiosity. The fear of a soccer takeover has always haunted Australian Rules, even at times when it was clearly the dominant sport. This fear often manifested itself in the form of active, strategic suppression of soccer. For example, a report in the *Melbourne Argus* from 1927 revealed the Victorian Football League's displeasure that Fitzroy's second XVIII had been asked to vacate the Brunswick Street Oval to make way for soccer. The VFL was flexing its muscle, asking 'a clause be inserted in the agreement that the ground be available for the Australian game during the whole of the season'. Seven years later, an article appeared in the 1934 VFL Grand Final edition of the *Football Record* titled 'Australian Game Vastly Superior', detailing one reader's experience of attending a soccer game in England. 'Believe me, soccer is not in the same street as our game and it made me feel proud to belong to an organisation that plays the Aussie code,' wrote G. Cathie.

In 1954, in the thick of the post-war migration that gave soccer a boost nationwide, the tension escalated to new heights. Australian Rules did not want to give up any territory to the new soccer clubs popping up across the country. 'There must be a

united front from all Australian football clubs to halt the soccer movement,' said Harold Snook, secretary of the Victorian Football Association. 'After all, the grounds and their amenities were built by the pioneers of the Australian game, yet soccer is just stepping in and taking it all away.' The slanging continued for years on end, but in 1980 there was an attempted partnership between Footscray J.U.S.T. and the Footscray Bulldogs. J.U.S.T. were granted permission to play at the Bulldogs' home ground, Western Oval, on Sundays, an arrangement that lasted just two games until the VFL stepped in and decreed that VFL venues were to be used for VFL purposes only.

However by 1996, there was plenty to be gained by the Australian Rules clubs working with soccer, rather than plotting against it. Ten years earlier, Ross Oakley had become chief executive of the VFL and oversaw its transformation into the nationwide AFL. Under his watch, a troubled suburban competition began taking in teams from Brisbane, Perth and Adelaide, while some of the original VFL clubs faced relocation or demise. More games were taken away from suburban venues and played at the MCG, in turn making it more expensive for the Melbourne clubs to maintain their home grounds. The solution to this problem was simple – more activity. The NSL switched to a summer season in 1989, taking them out of direct competition with the AFL and making soccer the obvious candidate to occupy the otherwise dormant grounds and supply some much-needed rent money. The AFL itself was vehemently opposed to the idea of any sort of partnership with a rival sport, but that didn't stop Collingwood or Carlton, two clubs which also harboured dreams of piggybacking on the world game's global appeal and spreading their brands internationally.

Undoubtedly though, the code with the most to gain was soccer. The plan was to use established loyalties from other sports as a vehicle into the hearts and minds of Australians who had previously shunned the NSL. Inspired by the Bradley Report from 1990, which said that Soccer Australia should 'create the image that soccer is not ethnic', the cross-code partnership was just

another part of Hill's sweeping reforms. Privately owned, broad-based teams like Perth Glory and Northern Spirit were introduced to great fanfare, pointing to a mass market that wasn't yet tapped. Hill ordered the ethnic clubs to follow their example by removing all traces of ethnicity from their logos and names, a directive met by fierce and sustained opposition. That was controversial, but choosing to open the door to AFL clubs was perhaps his most daring move yet. 'The challenge for us has been to take soccer into the mainstream of Australian society,' Hill said. 'And what better way to do it – particularly in a city like Melbourne where Aussie Rules is religion – than to get the Aussie Rules teams to put teams into our national soccer league?'

Lou Sticca's two loves growing up were Brunswick Juventus and Carlton Football Club. Like many second-generation Italian-Australians, he had a foot in both camps, but he grew tired of watching one game take off in popularity while the other was mired in an ugly, perennial struggle. Sticca tried to do his bit, serving as vice-president of Brunswick Juventus, a club established by Italian immigrants in 1948, while juggling a job as an insurance broker.

'I used to go to these weekly board meetings and it was more about how much meat we were going to have at the barbecue this week, and let's have another pizza night so we can raise money to pay the wages,' Sticca told *Leopold Method*. 'I'm thinking to myself, fuck me. You'd have board meetings until two o'clock in the morning and the next day, they'd change the decisions anyway. I thought this was going nowhere.'

Eventually, he resigned in the belief that while each ethnic community in Melbourne had its own soccer club to follow, broader Melbourne itself did not, and was aching for one. Sticca was a coterie member of Carlton, which allowed him into the change rooms at Optus Oval before AFL games. One day, while looking around at influential Carlton businessmen of Italian, Greek and Jewish background, he realised the answer was right there in front

of him. He proposed a soccer club to Carlton president John Elliot, who could see the potential. ‘We’ve got the stadium here, we’ve already got a fanbase of people who originally may have supported soccer,’ explained Sticca. ‘Bingo. That’s how we started Carlton Soccer Club.’

In another part of Melbourne, a man named Arthur Evriniadis, a long-time servant of Greek-backed Heidelberg United, was coming to a very similar realisation. Heidelberg was relegated from the NSL after the 1994-1995 season along with Brunswick Juventus and Parramatta Melita Eagles. Evriniadis, who was Heidelberg’s general manager at the time, could read the tea leaves and knew the days of the monocultural club were numbered, so he began looking for AFL clubs to shack up with. Heidelberg would provide a football operation and the on-field expertise; the AFL club would provide their name, off-field knowledge and their stadium. The first approach was actually to Richmond Tigers, which shared the same yellow and black colour scheme as Heidelberg. The Tigers were keen, but the club’s home ground Punt Road Oval was deemed insufficient for soccer, so Heidelberg and Evriniadis quickly moved onto their next target. Describing himself as ‘a Collingwood man – always have been since I was a little kid’, Evriniadis approached Collingwood’s then-chief executive Rob Petrie, who quickly showed interest in taking the partnership further.

When the news of what was being planned emerged, the AFL was naturally furious. It implemented a new law restricting AFL club involvement with any other sports, a direct response to Collingwood and Carlton. Essendon, meanwhile, was also examining the merits of forming a similar partnership with the Thomastown Zebras, a team from the Victorian state leagues. ‘We have concerns about all other football codes and their ability to eat into our market, be it among those attending our game, but particularly playing the game at a junior level,’ AFL communications manager Tony Peek said.

Multi-sport arrangements were all the rage in 1996 as clubs looked for new ways to reduce overheads. That year saw Sydney Olympic move into rugby league club Canterbury-Bankstown's Belmore Sports Ground. On top of their ground-sharing arrangement, the Bulldogs were investigating buying a controlling stake in the club. Sydney Roosters chairman Nick Politis also expressed his desire to field a team in the NSL, playing out of the Sydney Football Stadium, while Penrith Panthers were looking at setting up a new National Basketball League franchise. Marconi even considered entering a rugby league team into Sydney's second-tier competition, the Metropolitan Cup. But Sydney Kings owner Mike Wrubleski offered some cautionary words.

'The easy part is the agreeing on the infrastructure use, the use of management and administration,' he told the *Sydney Morning Herald*. 'The hard part is deciding where the priorities lie. If it is done for the wrong reasons – simply to try and make money – then it will create a war between the sports.'

But Collingwood and Carlton weren't about to lie down. After the AFL's interference, John Elliott threatened legal action, proclaiming that to prevent Carlton from participating in soccer would amount to a restraint of trade. After some negotiations, an agreement was reached that the new soccer entities would need to be completely separate, with no direct ownership or control from the AFL clubs. That didn't stop fans from dreaming of the day these great rivals would meet not on an oval-shaped field, but a rectangular pitch. Much to the AFL's chagrin, it was all systems go.

As the man who conceptualised the marriage between Collingwood and soccer, Evriniadis was the natural choice to become the inaugural chief executive of the Warriors. With Hill's initial announcement coming in March and the NSL season starting in October, he had a lot to do in very little time. Evriniadis said there was heavy involvement from Collingwood in the formative days of

the Warriors project, but it didn't take long for the two sides to butt heads.

The Warriors formed a three-man panel to interview and recommend candidates to become the inaugural senior coach. Their clear choice was Eddie Krncevic, who was home after a stint in Belgium and in the twilight of his playing career. As a well-spoken Australian international who had just returned from overseas, Collingwood were happy with Krncevic. The Heidelberg people, however, demanded Zoran Matic, a three-time NSL championship coach with Adelaide City. Matic was a significantly more expensive hire than Krncevic, blowing out costs and putting Collingwood executives offside. Evriniadis described the swerve of Matic's appointment as 'the start of the end' for the Warriors.

'You know when you go out with a new girl for the first time? It's all roses and hugs and kisses, she's going to be your soulmate forever. Then you see her with her make-up off. Well, in reality, that's what happened. Initially we presented a very professional front and Collingwood were impressed with that. But unfortunately at some stage we took our make-up off.'

Still, there was a season to plan for and a team to assemble, a task made easier by Matic's arrival. A widely respected manager, he signed quality players including Alan Davidson, Ernie Tapai, Andy Vlahos, Con Boutsianis and Frank Juric. Matic was an attraction for Kimon Taliadoros, who was one of the club's biggest signings. A Melbourne Demons supporter growing up, Taliadoros was happy to cast aside his own AFL ties and join a club that represented the potential for a new era in soccer. 'We felt the AFL had more to lose than we did,' he told *Leopold Method*.

The Warriors wore a garish strip that was very much a product of the time. It included Collingwood's famous black-and-white stripes but in a nod to Heidelberg, they were defaced by zig-zagging flashes of yellow. As a result it felt true to neither side. Evriniadis said the club 'agonised' over the jersey but planned to remove the yellow in

future seasons. With their striking new look settled, the Warriors couldn't have asked for a better start, beating a South Australian select XI, Adelaide City, South Melbourne and then Marconi to win the pre-season NSL Cup, the last time it was ever held.

Whether by design or chance, the Warriors' first game at Victoria Park was against the club that represented the very antithesis of the Hill vision. Melbourne Knights were the reigning NSL champions and the most militant of the ethnic clubs. More than 15,000 people came to soak in the occasion – a roll-up so large it overwhelmed the ground staff, creating traffic hazards and forcing kick-off to be delayed for almost half an hour. In keeping with the spirit of the joint venture, Collingwood legends Peter Daicos, Lou Richards and Bobby Rose were introduced to the crowd before the game, and the Warriors ran out onto the ground through a banner manufactured by the Collingwood cheer squad. An early goal from Boutsianis and a second-half brace from Taliadoros gave the Warriors a surprise 3-0 win and the perfect start to life in the NSL.

'The immediate response in the media and so forth was extraordinary,' Taliadoros said. 'This was the new dawn and that was the evidence. David Hill was excited, we were all excited. We thought if we could do that with a club like Collingwood, you could only imagine that other clubs and other sports might consider doing similar things.'

Evriniadis described the crowd itself as a split between diehard Collingwood fans, Heidelberg people, Knights supporters and general soccer followers who were intrigued by the concept of a match in the heart of AFL territory. 'After that first game, I actually had enquiries from all over Australia for membership. It looked like it was going to work,' he said.

It didn't. In fact, that first game was part of the reason why everything soon unravelled. Eviriniadis said there was a 'schism' on the board among the Heidelberg contingent that effectively led to the death of the AFL-soccer partnership weeks later.

‘One particular person on the board believed we had mismanaged the first game. He actually got some forensic accountants involved to see if we had embezzled the money,’ Eviriniadis said. ‘The forensic accountant found out that everything was above board and whatever dollars came through the door were recorded. But at that point, really, the crystal was broken. To appease that particular gentlemen from the Heidelberg side, the Collingwood people called me in, and they said, listen, this is the situation, for the good of this new club we’ve really got to part ways, and you’ve got to take your people with you. So we left.’

Under sustained pressure from the AFL, Collingwood progressively lost interest in the soccer experiment. The Warriors simply couldn’t shake the perception they were a trojan horse for Heidelberg. The rumours were there from day one, when Soccer Australia became aware of a letter from Collingwood chief executive Rob Petrie to a concerned member which said: ‘The Football Club will benefit financially with little or no monetary or human resource input other than to have representation on the board of the new club.’

There were even murmurs that long-time Heidelberg patron Jack Dardalis, the owner of Marathon Foods, was actually putting his own money into Collingwood, which was then shown in the Warriors’ accounts as the AFL club’s contribution. The more it went on, the more it became obvious that Collingwood was doing very little aside from lending its name and collecting rent cheques. Fans soon realised the Warriors were just another Greek club run in the same old way. Attendances plummeted to little more than 5000 for the second game at Victoria Park, and then dwindled to less than 2000. The reality of the situation dawned on the players when the Warriors’ operations were abruptly moved away from Victoria Park and into an external office.

‘A number of us started to question why there had been changes and why the organisation we’d come to understand was changing,’ Taliadoros said. ‘There didn’t seem to be any logical reasons why we’d be shifted out of the stadium. Of course information gets out

and we became aware that the relationship between the two clubs was basically non-existent, and irreconcilable.’

Payment of wages became inconsistent, and the team’s initial six-match unbeaten run quickly dovetailed into a four-match losing streak, including a 7-0 loss at Edensor Park to Sydney United. The lack of true depth in the squad was starting to show. In February 1997, on the weekend before the Warriors’ away match against UTS Olympic, Collingwood announced it would withdraw its financial support. New chief executive John May, president Kevin Rose and the board had met at the Peninsula Golf Club over two days to discuss Collingwood’s increasingly perilous finances and decided it was time to cut the Warriors loose and focus on their core business – running an AFL club.

With more than a third of the season still to run, this turn of events threw the NSL into chaos. Hill jumped on a plane and arranged an urgent meeting with the Collingwood and Heidelberg hierarchies at the Golden Wing Lounge at Melbourne Airport. The Warriors were set to withdraw from the competition immediately, with Rose declaring Collingwood would not commit ‘one cent’ to the \$300,000 needed to cover wages for the players and coaches to complete the season. However, Dardalis stepped in to meet the shortfall and assumed the presidency, while Collingwood – under threat of legal action from Hill and Soccer Australia – had to grin and bear it as farce unfolded in its name. Taliadoros was president of the Professional Footballers Association at the time, drawing him in direct conflict with Matic, who Taliadoros said was ‘philosophically opposed to unions’. Matic already had his hands full. He was practically running the club on his own after Evriniadis’ departure, a job which was made even more difficult when Victoria Park became unavailable due to AFL commitments.

‘Every morning before training, Zoran would get in the car at 9am and drive around Melbourne looking for a training venue,’

Taliadoros said. 'We very rarely trained at the same venue twice over the last six or eight weeks. We never quite knew where we would have to meet for training. We knew there may or may not be showers. It had gone to the other extreme, even worse than an amateur club. It was really a shocking situation – probably the worst I have encountered as a player.'

The scheduled game against Olympic never went ahead and was recorded as a 3-0 forfeit. The Warriors went on to lose four of their last six games and finished second from bottom. Their last home game, a 2-0 defeat to Brisbane Strikers, was played in front of just a few hundred people at Olympic Park. It was an ignominious exit for a club that promised so much but delivered only embarrassment in the end. Matic called it a 'good lesson', and said he was 'an idiot' for choosing Collingwood when there were traditional, well-established clubs that wanted to sign him. The experience cost Collingwood a total of \$328,653, but the reputational costs for soccer were far greater.

'I do think about where the blame actually lays,' Taliadoros said. 'It was just unfortunate timing. When the deal was done it was based on reasonable strategic thinking. There seemed to be a commitment from both parties where they would both bring value to create something that wouldn't otherwise exist. It was just unsustainable with the change in view from Collingwood, so for them it was a case of how they could manage their exit with the least amount of exposure. From a Heidelberg perspective it was a chance to once again get hold of a club in the national league. They were probably happy to take that opportunity but couldn't quite manage it in the end.'

Sticca watched on in horror as the disaster unfolded. Labelling Collingwood Warriors 'Heidelberg in drag', Sticca said the experiment showed Melbourne wanted a mainstream club, but its failure ruined Carlton's chances. He didn't so much learn from the

Warriors experience as much as it confirmed his views as to how a professional club should be run.

‘There’s no question in my mind at all that they really made it hard for people to trust a new entity. When your president is Jack Dardalis and your CEO is Arthur Evriniadis, blind Freddy could tell it was going to be Heidelberg. I think David Hill took the easy option, to be honest. His administration didn’t do any due diligence.’

Eddie Krncevic, the man the Warriors initially wanted, became Carlton’s inaugural coach, and he was in charge of a squad laden with talent. There was Kresimir Marusic, the newly-crowned Johnny Warren Medalist who was signed from Sydney United. In Vince Grella, Mark Bresciano and Simon Colosimo, Carlton secured three of the country’s best young prospects. The experienced Dean Anastasiadis held down the goalmouth, while Danny Allsopp sat up front with Vlahos, who came across from Collingwood.

Off the field, things were well under control. ‘John Elliott, Stephen Gough and James Sutherland – the guys who are now running the MCG and Cricket Australia – they were the key people I worked with at Carlton,’ Sticca said. ‘They bent over backwards to accommodate anything and everything that I wanted. I can’t fault them.’

Sticca enticed several big-name sponsors to jump onboard, including Parmalat and Nike, which was making its first foray into football in southeast Asia. Australian Institute of Sport graduate Colosimo spent his junior days in close proximity to Sticca at Brunswick Juventus and also grew up supporting Carlton in the AFL, so for him this move was a dream come true.

‘It was full-time training, the facilities were excellent, the coaching staff, support staff and all the little things – they were all there then,’ he told *Leopold Method*. ‘Some A-League sides probably now don’t have all of what was there. They raised the bar. Back then football was not very commercial. But I remember seeing posters of AFL players and footballers together, on the same

poster. We're seeing that now but previously, we hadn't seen that. There was a good feel among all of that.'

The build-up for Carlton's first game against Perth Glory at Optus Oval was immense, and neither Sticca nor Elliott was afraid to add to it, proclaiming the club would soon become the 'Manchester United of Asia'. So there was a commensurate amount of disappointment when fewer than 6000 people were on hand for the season opener. The players held up their end of the bargain – the first goal came just six minutes into the club's existence through David Cervinski, while Allsopp scored just before the hour mark for a 2-1 win. But the atmosphere was what one would expect from a crowd figure like that in a stadium that held 30,000 and was better suited to Australian Rules or cricket.

The jury was out, but the team kept winning. It took until round eight for Carlton to taste defeat for the first time, falling 2-1 to UTS Olympic. Then on the following weekend came the event that Sticca believes effectively killed off any hope of success for Carlton SC. On November 29, 1997, Iran drew 2-2 with the Socceroos at the MCG to qualify for the 1998 FIFA World Cup and consign Australian soccer for another four years of pain.

'It left everyone at that stadium and everyone in the country deflated. It's funny because eight or nine years later, I'm at Telstra Stadium in Sydney and we beat Uruguay on the penalty kicks, and that was only four or five weeks into the A-League. In one case you had a deflated population, in the other it was an ecstatic population. It was the exact opposite. And I was involved with Sydney FC in year one. I've seen it, both times. I'm not making excuses, I'm stating the facts.'

The momentum might have been sucked out of the sport, but not from Carlton's season. Krncevic's men pushed on to finish in second place, just three points behind South Melbourne. Those two sides would meet in the NSL Grand Final, where a last-gasp goal

from Boutsianis gave South a 2-1 victory in front of 16,000 fans at Olympic Park. Heartbreak aside, it was an incredible effort for Carlton to get so far in year one. But the club's ills remained. The average attendance figure was just 4,191 for home games, which themselves were rendered unsightly contests due to the cricket pitch in the middle of the field.

'Our model was based on everything but gate receipts,' Sticca said. 'The problem is the media made the low crowds the issue, so it became a self-fulfilling prophecy. We got 6000 the first game and we budgeted for 3500, so we actually exceeded budget. In year one, we lost \$60,000. For a start-up, that's incredible.'

Carlton SC's biggest strength was also a millstone hanging around its neck. The association with Carlton may have given the soccer operation a sound financial backing and some much-needed clout in the crowded Melbourne sporting marketplace, but it also instantly turned off anyone who didn't support Carlton in the AFL. For a supposed broad-based entity, that was a fatal flaw. Sticca said that the name 'Carlton' was key to getting the AFL club to bankroll the team, but admitted another name might've been wiser.

Heading into the 1998-99 season, the Australian soccer landscape changed again when Channel Seven acquired the television rights for the NSL. The deal was one of Hill's last actions as chairman of Soccer Australia, and he proclaimed it as proof that Australia was 'a highly respected international competing soccer nation'. Seven, however, farmed out coverage of matches to their pay television arm C7 Sport and the ABC, and only broadcast highlights packages in graveyard timeslots. Following C7's demise, it was later revealed in court that Seven had worked in concert with the AFL to 'suffocate' soccer by warehousing the rights and keeping the NSL off air.

The second-year blues hit Carlton SC hard. The initial surprise factor was gone, and wins were suddenly much more difficult to come by. Krncevic steered his side to 11th on the ladder with just

nine victories for the season. Of course, if crowds were poor when Carlton was winning, they weren't going to get any better when the team started losing. Northern Spirit entered the NSL the same season and their immediate success posed the question of why it was taking Carlton so long to hit the same heights – or if they ever would. At the same time, pressure was mounting from Soccer Australia, which had decided it would no longer put up with games being played on cricket pitches, and ordered Carlton SC to find an alternate ground to Optus Oval.

'That's when Carlton Football Club said guys, if we can't make it work at our own stadium... we never got involved to be a tenant at another stadium,' Sticca said. 'That's when they said if you can sell it, sell it. It wasn't a fire sale, they just said, Lou, if the opportunity comes, we'll sell it.'

The opportunity did come – a consortium led by AFL player manager Peter Jess purchased the club for \$1.5 million from Carlton FC, which made a tidy profit from the whole experience. One of Jess' first orders was to move the club to Olympic Park. Carlton's last game at Optus Oval was on February 28, 1999, a hollow 3-1 loss to Sydney United, around the time when the sale was settled.

Jess promised to unlock Carlton's potential. 'We have looked closely at this and believe that soccer is on a J-curve and about to take off,' he said. Jess wanted to cast the net further, and strongly contemplated a name change to Melbourne Blues, Melbourne City or Melbourne Victory – but he erred on the side of caution, and kept the status quo heading into Carlton's third season, the 1999-2000 NSL campaign. Stuart Munro was appointed coach following Krncevic's defection to Marconi, and with fresh impetus they returned to their winning ways. Finishing third on the table, Carlton came to within one game of the grand final, defeated by eventual champions Wollongong Wolves in the semi-final. Crowds, however, remained minuscule, and Carlton's only real income was

through transfer fees. With the club suffering at the turnstiles and in an era where there were no healthy broadcast dividends from the governing body to lean back on, Jess was bleeding money. Players are often the first to suffer in these situations, and Colosimo remembers well when a stony-faced Sticca addressed the group the first time wages were paid late.

‘Lou was always about your appearance is everything – no thongs to training, make sure you dress well when you come to training,’ he said. ‘All these little things, trying to build the profile off the field, because he knew he had the product on the field. That day he said, “look guys, I’ve always been hard on making sure you’re clean-shaven and presenting yourselves well. I was playing my part in making sure everything around you was good. I can’t promise that anymore. If you want to do all those things, that’s fine. I can’t expect you to deliver if I’m not delivering.” Not that I didn’t have it previously, but I gained a lot of respect for Lou that day. In those moments, the illusion dropped.’

A frustrated Sticca resigned in January 2000. ‘It wasn’t what I’d started,’ he said. ‘I started the Carlton Soccer Club because I wanted it to be run and owned by the Carlton Football Club, at Optus Oval, because I thought all the ingredients were there. The goalposts were moved, as such, and I didn’t feel I could keep the thing running in the right direction.’

By the time the 2000-01 season rolled around the situation became perilous. Optus Oval was a distant memory; the club now played at Bob Jane Stadium (and later, Epping Stadium) but spread its weekday operations to various locations throughout Melbourne, which took away from the ultra-professional image Carlton projected in its early days. Colosimo remembers having to drive ‘here, there and everywhere’ to complete his rehabilitation after the knee injury he suffered from that infamous tackle from Manchester United’s Andy Cole.

Jess soon came to the end of his tether. The PFA called for an independent audit of the club after Carlton missed the due date for payment of wages for the fifth time in six months. Soccer

Australia revealed the club had not paid the required \$250,000 bank guarantee usually drawn upon in such emergencies, while the tax office was chasing \$236,000 in unpaid group tax. The Carlton owners were in up to their necks. A couple of would-be white knights entered into talks with Jess over a rescue package for the licence – including businessman Con Makris, who wanted to turn them into the ‘Adelaide Blues’ – but it was too late. Eight rounds into the season, Carlton SC was pronounced dead, the players became free agents, and everyone scattered from the corpse of yet another failed Hill reform. Two years later, speaking out about Carlton’s demise for the first time, Jess provided an ironic postscript – ‘I think if we still had some links to the Italian community and broader community (in Carlton), that would have been far better for us.’

Thus ended the five-year flirtation between soccer and AFL, one that began with great hope on both sides but soon crashed and burned in spectacular fashion. The codes have largely kept their distance ever since. But over the years, there have been various adaptations of the original concept – the Parramatta Leagues Club-owned Parramatta Power played in the NSL from 1999, while under the turbulent ownership of Nathan Tinkler in Newcastle, the Knights and Jets effectively combined their off-field operations.

As the A-League considers expansion to 12 teams, former Western Sydney Wanderers chairman Lyall Gorman has declared his new employers, rugby league club Cronulla Sharks, could help provide a third Sydney team based on the Sutherland Shire. Meanwhile, Richmond ruckman Ivan Maric is the new president of the St Albans Saints in NPL Victoria. Things have come a long way since 1954, however suspicion remains between the codes. In October 2014, Andrew Demetriou’s successor at the AFL, Gillon McLaughlin, said it would be great if the Wanderers could actually ‘collaborate’ with the Giants. David Gallop’s response was blunt: ‘What would that entail?’

Evriniadis maintains Collingwood Warriors would have worked out had they been a start-up club in the A-League, while Colosimo can't ever see soccer making the same mistake again. 'The game can stand on its own feet now,' he said. Sticca, however, remains hopeful. Melbourne Victory became the club that Carlton was supposed to be, but not even they can avoid some sort of shared history with the AFL – the white chevron on their home shirt is clearly inspired by the 'Big V' on the iconic Victorian State of Origin guernsey. Sticca is happy to accept his creation was the precursor to Victory, noting that Carlton 'were just 10 years ahead of our time'. If NFL owners can buy up MLS franchises and European clubs can run multiple sports under the one umbrella, Sticca believes it can be done in Australia. It's all in the execution.

'If somebody's got the money and the know-how to run one particular sport, it doesn't mean they can run another sport, but it doesn't exclude them either,' he said. 'If you've got the money, the vision and the ability to go out and recruit the right people, you can do it. Anything can work if it's done properly. Unfortunately with us, the NSL was sinking faster than what we realised at the time and with the benefit of hindsight, we would have delayed our entry. But with the benefit of hindsight, we'd all be better off, wouldn't we?'



THE QUIET AUSTRALIANS

KIERAN PENDER

AUSTRALIA HAS A COACHING PROBLEM. NOT, THOUGH, THAT the sun-tanned nation doesn't have enough good managers: every year a multitude of coaches graduate from A, B or C licence courses, imbued with Football Federation Australia's tactical ethos. Rather, Australia has too many coaches, overqualified for the available state league positions and unable to find an opportunity among the professional ranks.

Across the country, there are nine A-League head coach jobs, plus the corresponding assistant and youth roles. Add in the odd coaching spot at state federations, the various national team positions, perhaps a few others at academies, and you have the sum total of full-time coaching roles in Australia. Certainly less than 100, and not significantly more than 50. As a result, when the time-honoured supply and demand economic equation is applied to football coaching, the results provide little hope for aspiring managers.

Yet rather than be dejected by the lack of opportunities, several young coaches have taken the initiative and gazed northwards to Asia. Following a path first navigated two decades ago, these managers have made the most of a bad situation and are thriving in a range of exotic locations. Coaching in foreign climes is not easy. Language difficulties, culture shock and divergent football philosophies are just some of the multifaceted challenges facing

prospective managers. Yet for some, the lack of jobs at home necessitates a leap of faith abroad.

For Ron Smith, one of the first Australian coaches to ply his trade in Asia, the decision was less deliberate pioneering and more random opportunity. In the late 1980s and early 1990s, many Australian players moved to Asia in search of opportunities, and before long, coaches began to join them. Seeing that his side Sabah FA was in need of assistance, former Socceroo Scott Ollerenshaw recommended Smith to the club at what proved to be a fortuitous time. ‘I first went to Malaysia in 1995,’ Smith told *Leopold Method*. ‘I was on leave from the Australian Institute of Sport and I was asked to help a club out of trouble, so I did.’

With some prior understanding of football in the region, the Tottenham Hotspurs youth product was able to right the ship at Sabah and take them to 1996 Malaysia Cup final. A brief stint overseas soon morphed into a long-term contract, and he would spend most of the next decade in Malaysia, winning the league championship at Sabah before moving to Johor FA and the national football association.

Thankfully for Smith, who was until recently an assistant at A-League club Brisbane Roar, this transition from the genteel environs of the AIS to the challenges of Asia was made easier by Ollerenshaw and a number of other English-speaking players on the team. However, even something as innocuous as the weather could present obstacles, with the increased rainfall and wet pitches forcing some style-of-play adaptations. On soaked fields, tactical innovations often mean little and both teams are brought to the same level.

‘Climate conditions were a very real problem,’ Smith said. ‘I remember one night playing a match where we had a downpour just on the half-time break. The rain came down so heavily it flooded our dressing room. We had a half-time interval that lasted an hour, and started the second half at midnight.’

Smith later proved instrumental in the arrival of another early pioneer, British manager Steve Darby. ‘Like most things in football, it was not a planned move,’ explains Darby, who was assistant coach at Mumbai City FC in the inaugural Indian Super League season in 2014. ‘I had spent five years in the old Australian Soccer Federation as National Youth Development Manager. After some time with Sydney Olympic, out of nowhere in 1998 Ron rang me to see if I wanted to come to Johor FA in Malaysia for about eight weeks to try to save them from relegation from Division 2.

‘It worked out well. I quadrupled my salary, saved them from relegation and won the Malaysia Cup. I stayed three years in Johor, and apart from a year at Sheffield Wednesday as Academy Director, I’ve spent the rest of my time in Asia: Singapore, Vietnam, Malaysia and India.’

While Smith and Darby may have stumbled across a viable alternative route to coaching in the 1990s, a new crop of young managers are now exploring possibilities in even further afield locations. *Leopold Method* spoke to four coaches – David Perkovic, Hussein Skenderovic, Nathan Hall and Arthur Papas – all of whom are racking up frequent flyer miles around Asia as they endeavour to improve their coaching. Two decades later, the trials and tribulations of working abroad remain very similar, along with the importance of contacts for getting that all important foot in the door.

A western Sydney local, Perkovic became interested in football through his Croatian family background, starting as a junior with a nearby team before joining Sydney United. After deciding to end his playing career at 21 partly due to injury, Perkovic walked away from the sport. ‘I didn’t even watch football for a year or two,’ he said. ‘I wanted to disassociate myself from it.’ Yet exile did not last long. Perkovic, 33, turned to coaching after the 2006 World Cup, taking over New South Wales Super League side Fraser Park FC in 2011. Like Smith before him, Perkovic availed himself of an Asian opportunity with the help of a player.

‘I was coaching state league football, and one season I had a few Japanese imports in my team,’ Perkovic explained. ‘One of them later found themselves playing professionally in the Philippines, and perhaps a year after I had coached him his new manager resigned. He spoke to management, recommended they speak to me, and one thing led to another.’

For Skenderovic, until recently the conditioning coach and analyst at FC Goa in India, the decision to strike out overseas was part pragmatism and part opportunism. A former player with Melbourne Knights in the old National Soccer League and St Albans Saints in the Victorian Premier League, Skenderovic was introduced to coaching by Phil Stubbins. After beginning his career under the current Newcastle Jets boss’s wing as an u-21 coach at Richmond FC, Skenderovic later spent time as an assistant before joining Oakleigh Cannons as head coach. Frustrated by the lack of accessible pathways, searching for employment across the globe soon became an obvious option.

‘The federations have done really well with the coaching education process, and as a result I think we have some great coaches that are probably beyond state-level,’ he said. ‘With limited opportunities in Australia, it was just a natural progression to think “if I want to be a full-time professional, I might need to head overseas to find new pastures.”’

This gamble – described by Skenderovic as ‘biting the bullet’ – led to the United Arab Emirates, where he found a role as technical director for an Arabian Gulf League club in July 2012. He cautions, however, that budding managers considering the same pathway must first grapple with several difficult decisions.

‘The first question is whether you want to be a career coach or a part-time coach. If you believe that you have the qualities and are confident in yourself and your methods, then choose the former. With opportunities so few in Australia, you have to look beyond these shores. If you would prefer the latter, you are not going to chase it: you’ll concentrate on your normal 9am-5pm job and then coach in the evenings.’

‘You also need a clear understanding of where you are at as a coach. Unless you have done a thorough apprenticeship in Australia, then do not look overseas because you will get eaten alive over here. Once you’ve done that apprenticeship: worked with youth, as an assistant and in senior coaching, then it’s a matter of asking “can I take the next step?”’

Skenderovic’s observation as to the lack of opportunities in Australia is echoed by many other coaches who spoke with *Leopold Method*. Unless the A-League rapidly expands, it seems the same dilemma will continue to confront coaches in this country. This is particularly problematic for coaches without a high-level playing background, like many of those interviewed for this article, who lack the profile to attract opportunities. At just 29 years of age, Hall has had a whirlwind career coaching, working in Thailand, Indonesia, India, Bangladesh and Vanuatu, all inspired by a frustration with the few available possibilities for career progression at home.

‘I started my coaching career very young,’ he explained. A Sutherland Sharks junior with longstanding family connections to the club, Hall turned to the managerial side of the game in 2004. ‘My first job was as under-18 coach at the Sharks. I was 19 years of age coaching 16 and 17 year olds. Then six years in the state leagues was enough for me,’ says Hall, who found his initial overseas start in 2010 at Thai Premier League club Port FC. ‘I had a lot of ambition and energy, and I knew that if I stayed in Australia I would not fulfill my potential because opportunities are so limited.’

A glance at the A-League managers on this side of the Tasman during the year Hall left bears out his assessment: one foreign import (Vítězslav Lavicka at Sydney FC), and the rest older coaches with Australian experience (Branko Culina at Newcastle Jets, Lawrie McKinna at Central Coast Mariners, Ernie Merrick at Melbourne Victory, Ange Postecoglou at Brisbane Roar, David Mitchell at Perth Glory, Ian Ferguson at Northern Fury, Miron Bleiberg at Gold Coast United and Aurelio Vidmar at Adelaide

United). No opportunities, in other words, for budding young managers without a high-profile playing background.

‘There are so few professional coaching positions in Australia – a lot of coaches go down the track of owning an academy – but in terms of senior football there is not much on offer,’ Perkovic said. ‘I know a lot of coaches frustrated by that lack of opportunity, particularly if you are not a former player. Although when this position in the Philippines came up I was not overly frustrated about the lack of pathways – I’m a young coach and the opportunity came earlier than expected – I certainly recognise the problem.’

Ollerenshaw, now a businessman in Malaysia, concurs with this analysis and highlights coaching education expenses – B and C licences are individually upwards of \$2,000, while each section of the three-part A licence costs \$2,530 – as a factor pushing Australians overseas. The managing director of Borneo Sports & Adventure Holidays, Ollerenshaw acts as a kind of fixer for compatriot players and managers in the region. Having helped open doors and ease the transition from Australia to Asia, he is popular among the coaching fraternity. ‘The main reason that coaches are looking to come to Asia is because there are so few quality jobs back in Australia,’ he said. ‘You have coaches asked to do their A licences and spend a lot of money – but then, apart from the A-League and a few director of coaching jobs, there are no full-time positions. They are looking to go to Asia because they have no choice.’

Apart from the desire for a full-time income, money does not seem to be a primary motivating factor driving Australian coaches northwards. While the well-worn clichés are trotted out whenever a still-in-their-prime footballer moves to the Middle East or elsewhere on the continent, young coaches do not appear as well remunerated or subject to that media cynicism.

Papas, who until recently worked with FC Goa and has previously coached the Indian under-23 national team, moved into

management after several knee injuries cruelled his prospects as a player. Having first completed a coaching course as a teenager, Papas went on to study exercise science and gained postgraduate coaching qualifications. He was the youngest ever VPL Coach of the Year in 2011, after joining Oakleigh Cannons as a 30-year-old and leading them to the grand final. He then became a scholarship coach under Jan Versleijen at the AIS, responsible for the development of Australia's best and brightest talents. Stints as an assistant at Melbourne Heart and Newcastle Jets soon followed, and it was not long until Papas was jetting off to lead the Indian Olympic side. Once forced to moonlight as a cleaner to supplement his scholarship wage while in Canberra, Papas's decision to leave the Jets was motivated by the potential experience, not a vast salary.

'When I made the initial move the contract was actually less in monetary terms than what Newcastle were offering, but the opportunity was greater,' the 35 year old said. 'Obviously the cost of living is lower, so in relative terms it might have been equal, but I certainly was not better off moving to Asia.'

'I've never been particularly motivated by money though. When the opportunity came to go to India as the Olympic team coach, I thought "not many managers in their career get the chance to manage a national team". At 32 that is a really good learning experience: working in Asia, in tough conditions and environments, back to the wall.'

Perkovic is also keen to dismiss any myth that coaching in Asia is a lucrative junket, and indicates that his recent decision to return home from the Philippines was partly because he did not consider the position financially viable. 'Being a professional in football is not always financially rewarding,' he said. 'I do this for the passion of being a coach. If money comes from it eventually that is great, but you certainly don't plan a career in coaching because you want to get rich.'

If the lack of opportunities in Australia is forcing coaches to leave these shores, several potentially troubling questions arise. Is this exodus good for football development down under? How do playing standards across these competitions compare with the state leagues back home? Are they just in Asia on a junket while their coaching skills stall in sub-par football? In sum, is this phenomenon a net positive for football in Australia?

Although generalisations may not tell the entire story, and a coach's ethos and their club environment may impact the answer to these questions, it appears that on balance the Asian experience can certainly be beneficial for coaches. To start with, for some a move to Asia could be their first foray into full-time professional coaching. Regardless of the quality of football (which those interviewed all attest to as being good and improving), the ability to spend all day, every day coaching is evidently positive.

'It was an eye-opening experience in terms of being able to fully concentrate on football,' said Perkovic. 'Previously I was working at a state league club and also had a full-time job as a business development manager which restricted how much research and time I could put into my coaching away from the pitch. Over there I could work eight hours off the pitch and two hours on the pitch every single day, and I used that time to develop my philosophy and to improve my coaching. One year of full-time coaching might be equivalent to five years of part-time football if you properly utilise your time.'

Hall, a good friend of Perkovic, echoes this point: 'You learn on the job because you are running hundreds of training sessions. I'm organising 300 sessions a year, but if for example I was coaching APIA Leichhardt it is a seven month season training two nights a week. So I'm doing 50 sessions there as opposed to 300 in Asia. Over time you become better: you are on the training ground, running more sessions, analysing more games.'

Away from the mandated structures of the FFA's national football curriculum, these coaches are also free to experiment and adapt their preferred style of play to local conditions. Although

most retain core tenets of the curriculum – preaching its benefits across the continent – the ability to play with and against different systems is an obvious positive. When asked as to the main developmental benefit of working in India, Papas responds without hesitation.

‘Taking my own coaching philosophy and putting it into practice in a different country, which did not really have a style of play in place at the national team level. I brought a very different approach across, and it has been proven effective in different countries.

‘The greatest learning tool on the field is coaching against different styles of play. In Australia we have mandated the 4-3-3, and everyone is playing that system; all we understand how to play against is the 4-3-3. When I played the UAE they play a 4-5-1 and are very proactive on the ball. When I played Turkmenistan they play a 4-4-2 and back off behind the half-way line and try to hit you on the counter-attack. And then in the Indian I-League you are playing against Spanish coaches, Dutch coaches, coaches from Africa – and they all bring their own styles of play. This sharpens your mind tactically, and made me much more adaptable.’

These generalisations are just that, however, and Perkovic stresses that the benefits of coaching in Asia are reliant on the efforts of each coach. ‘It depends on the individual – whether they take the opportunity and really use it to develop themselves, or whether they are just going to say they are a professional coach, and work the same way as they would in a state league club.’

A further caveat should also be added, which Smith explained succinctly: ‘There are also downsides to being overseas. A friend of mine has had a lot of national team and club coaching experience in Asia. He applied for a job at a state federation, and did not even get an interview. If you stay overseas for too long, you become a forgotten entity.’

Although this does not particularly bother Hall, who is well-

settled and has long-term plans in Asia, he admits it could represent a real concern for some. ‘You can certainly get lost,’ he said. ‘If you are a coach that wants to come to Asia for a few years with the goal of returning to Australia to be considered for an A-League job, there is definitely a chance that can happen. I think there is a lack of respect at times for Asian football.’

While that may represent a legitimate risk, it perhaps says more about the Australian football system than the benefits of coaching in Asia. And the danger of being forgotten has certainly not caused Skenderovic to lose any sleep, especially when he can spend his days chatting with a former Arsenal great and coaching alongside Brazilian legend Zico. ‘In Australia there are not too many coaches able to tell someone like Robert Pires what to do, or get his opinion and advice. One of the greatest things about working over here is it gets you out of your comfort zone and puts you under pressure, but once you have been through it you can see real benefits.’

For Australian managers, perhaps the most challenging aspect of an Asian sortie is adapting to different cultural norms and traditions both on and off the pitch. Of the numerous coaches interviewed by *Leopold Method*, all highlighted the initial difficulties – some basic, some complex – faced while adjusting to diverse new lifestyles.

‘You are dealing with things like the electricity going out all the time, air conditioners not working, not being able to source clean and proper food,’ Skenderovic said of his experiences in the UAE and India. ‘Where do you shop? How do you communicate? There are a lot these of internal challenges that can really eat at you if you do not learn to adapt. If you are not strong enough, you do not last in these places.’

Papas, Skenderovic’s colleague for a brief time at FC Goa, certainly agrees. To the former Newcastle assistant the confronting cultural differences can at times pose great personal challenges. He said missing the comforts of home makes it all the more difficult

to settle in a foreign land. He describes adapting to the local culture as ‘a never-ending process.’ For Papas, these difficulties are all beneficial lessons learned by foreign coaches working in Asia. Even on the pitch, the challenges of conveying a coaching philosophy are heightened by language and cultural barriers that a successful manager must overcome. This, Papas believes, will only make him a better coach.

‘The best experience for me has been working with players of a different cultural background. At the AIS I worked with many of the top young players in Australia, and the way you have to get the message across to them is completely different to how I do that to the Indian players. There is a hierarchy system over here: some players might struggle to look you in the eye when you are talking to them. Back home you would probably get offended by that, but in India you have to accept that such behaviour is how they pass across their respect to you.

‘Furthermore, when you are in Australia at the AIS, for example, those boys are very talented, but they are not the people that are going to put food on the table at the end of the week for their families. And yet I’m dealing with players over here that are so desperate to earn another contract or get their career started because that is the responsibility they live with, and we’re not just talking immediate family but extended family as well!’

In a similar vein, resource-related problems can cause angst for coaches working in the region, and while such concerns are hardly unique to Asia, they are undoubtedly more pronounced than in Australia.

‘India is not a country rich in football-specific facilities,’ said Papas. ‘Sometimes you have a change room, other times you don’t have a change room. When I took on the job at Dempo FC – probably the most successful club in Indian football – I was shocked because we did not even have a club room or change room. So instead of just coaching, I’m also building the club!’

Similarly, a lack of financial resources has also caused problems for Hall. At one club, he wasn't paid for nearly four months. While new surrounds may initially prove problematic, arguably an even bigger challenge faced by Australian coaches seeking opportunities on foreign shores is having to leave behind friends, family and loved-ones. For Perkovic, the opportunity to coach professionally in the Philippines arrived not long after getting married. While his wife was happy for him to pursue a dream, the young coach admits that distance posed personal obstacles.

'Being away from my wife was obviously quite difficult,' Perkovic admitted. 'But I'm a resilient character, and despite the challenges I saw it as a great opportunity for my coaching development. I definitely come back home a much better coach.'

Permanently based in Sabah, Malaysia, Ollerenshaw has adapted well since first coming to the region as a player two decades ago, and offered guidance for coaches considering the switch. He said coaches considering a foray into Asia should view it as an 'adventure', and to be willing to adapt and respect cultural and religious differences. 'You have to adapt,' he said, 'it's not up to them.'

While the answers of Australian coaches in Asia to many questions diverge, two consistent themes stand out. When asked to provide advice to those interested in following in their footsteps, the responses were clear: get on the ground, and do your research. As a technical director in the UAE, Skenderovic advises budding coaches to get overseas themselves rather than simply send them from Australia.

'I can tell you I have received so many resumés, but you do not even get the time to read them. We were looking at bringing in a new under-15 coach to our club [Ajman FC] last year. One candidate had two telephone numbers: one in Dubai and one in London. I tried the Dubai number and he was not there, I tried the London number and he said "I can't be in the UAE for another week". So I said "don't worry, thank you very much."

‘I went over there with nothing lined up to knock on doors, meet and communicate with people: even if it meant staying for two months in a bad hotel! You need to be able to demonstrate your ability – start educating people about your philosophy and processes and principles. I went from being a nobody to being a technical director, working with the UAE youth national teams etc, just from networking and demonstrating my ability. You cannot do that from back in Australia. There was an element of risk, it was a bit of a gamble to just go over there, but my best piece of advice to any young coach that wants to venture off: get over there!’

Hall took a similar path, relocating to Thailand and eventually securing an assistant manager job. He networked, met other managers, watched as many matches as possible, volunteered and took the relevant people out to lunch. He says it cost him ‘a stack of money’, but considers it an investment. At 29, he has now worked in five countries, his face is known across the continent and he was just a few minutes away from qualifying for the Club World Cup in Morocco with Amicale FC. ‘That does not happen if you stay at home in the state league and send a few emails.’

Ollerenshaw offers similar advice, but adds a caveat: ‘It’s not easy to get jobs in Asia. It is not like we have a list of 60 people that have come over here and coached. Sometimes you just have to be in the right spot at the right time. Like anywhere, you have to build relationships, and sometimes you have to do something for free. Say “can I come over for one month, and I’ll work for free, and you can watch me work?” But how many coaches in Australia are prepared to do this?’

He also stresses that, as in many coaching jobs, winning is essential. ‘To survive over here you must be successful in your first job. Once you get on the coaching “merry-go-round” you are okay, but in order to get there you must do well at first. So for Australians coming over that first job is pivotal, and if they get a reputation they can survive for a while. To survive a long time over here,

though, you have to be everything: a coach, a politician. It is not easy.'

Darby agrees and offered the following sagely advice: 'There is only one philosophy in professional football in Asia: winning games. Don't let anyone fool you into believing that a "passing game" or "playing out from the back" matter if you lose.'

Once a job is in the offing, research on the league and club are essential according to both Perkovic and Papas. While the former suggests his advice is applicable in any coaching position, he stresses it is particularly important in Asia: 'Do your research on the club and the league, and see whether the club will provide you with an environment where you can succeed.'

Papas concurs, arguing that the difficulty of the challenge means prior preparation is vitally important. 'Do as much research as you can and try to get as many different experiences as possible before attempting something like this, because it is going to test you on all levels.'

The 21st century, so the current political rhetoric goes, belongs to Asia. Spurred by the ever-expanding economic behemoths of China and India, the continent's dramatic rise is having significant ramifications across the globe. As global markets witness continued growth from Muscat to Manila, Australia's geographical location – so often considered a hindrance – has gained added utility. The federal government's 2012 white paper on the topic even mused 'the Asian century is an Australian opportunity'.

In many ways, the nation's pivot to Asia has been foreshadowed by the FFA's movements. Tired of trouncing minnows across the Pacific only to falter against the likes of Uruguay in World Cup qualifiers, the FFA joined the Asian Football Confederation in 2005. A decade later and Australia has just hosted the region's flagship tournament, the Socceroos have twice qualified for world football's main event through Asia, and the Western Sydney Wanderers are current continental champions.

At a macro level, Australia's pivot to Asia will undoubtedly have profound ramifications for the country, just as the FFA's switch to

the AFC has changed the face of football across the nation. Yet simultaneously, both developments provide innumerable micro-scale opportunities. Free trade agreements with China et al will provide bountiful market access for many niche industries, while the rise of football across the continent could prove a boon for the broader Australian sporting industry.

As the Australia in the Asian Century white paper observed, ‘Professional football leagues will continue to develop and there will be a steady shift in professional football leadership to Asia creating considerable business and other opportunities.’ While players from the green and gold land have long plied their trade across the continent, the Asian pivot could assist in the spread of Australian coaches and officials from Dubai to Dhaka.

Given the growth potential for Australian coaching in Asia, it is perhaps surprising that the FFA dedicated just one paragraph in their 30-page white paper submission to the topic. Prefacing a short list of Australian managers employed on Asian soil at the time was an unimaginative statement: ‘Apart from players, Australia is also beginning to grow its exports to Asia in the areas of coaching expertise.’

The coaches interviewed by *Leopold Method* were all vocal about the possibilities offered by Asia and the numerous benefits – both individually and for Australian football more broadly – that would flow from a greater connectivity with the region. Ollerenshaw talks about the advantages to Australian national and club sides, while Skenderovic focuses more on the tactical benefits and knowledge transfer.

‘Asian football and the mentality there is very different,’ says Skenderovic. ‘In Australia the game is much cleaner, the tactics are more progressive, yet we need to build teams that can play in Asia. When you come here you deal with obstacles: weather, travel, officials – they are all challenging and confronting, but you need to be able to overcome them.’

Despite the increase in Australian coaches working in Asia, our own supply and demand equation will continue to hamper their aspirations. Perkovic has now returned home from the Philippines and has picked up the head coaching gig with St. George in the New South Wales NPL. As he looks around, however, former players such as the Vidmar brothers Aurelio and Tony, John Aloisi, Steve Corica, Paul Okon and Kevin Muscat – to name just a few – are shoehorned into high-profile management positions almost immediately after their playing days are over. Perkovic, like many of his peers, continues to suffer the burden of not being a recognised former player. ‘I’ve enrolled in the A licence course, which I see as an important part of my progression,’ he said. ‘But it is very difficult to find full-time coaching work in this country.’



A FAIR GO FOR ALL: HOW FOOTBALL CAN PROVIDE A HOME FOR NEW MIGRANTS

SHAUN MOONEY

‘Too often we celebrate our diversity without first asking whether a fair go and egalitarianism extend to all Australians, regardless of their cultural backgrounds.’
Don’t go back to where you came from: Why multiculturalism works Tim Soutphommasane

IT WAS THE PERFECT PHOTO OP. CHILDREN OF VARIOUS CULTURAL backgrounds holding hands on Blacktown Football Park’s synthetic pitch. Joining in the circle was then federal Labor minister for sport, Kate Lundy, with the Football Federation of Australia’s CEO David Gallop watching on in the background. AFL club president Eddie McGuire once dubbed western Sydney as ‘the land of falafel’: a derogatory statement that confirmed many people’s prejudices about the area. Here, FFA and the Labor government were turning the western Sydney stereotype into a positive, lunching 2013 Harmony Through Football Initiative as part of Harmony Day celebrations.

‘Football is the face of Australia and is a sport that truly reflects the cultural diversity of our nation,’ said Gallop, as children played small-sided football games in the background. ‘With 1.7 million participants, football is Australia’s most inclusive and accessible sport, one that bridges gender, age, linguistic, ethnic and religious divides.’

Footage of this event was shown on SBS’s football program *The World Game*, who was also a partner of the Harmony Through Football initiative. Elder statesman Les Murray commented,

We have been talking about this worryingly on this program, blogging about it, week after week. Firstly, not engaging the fans. Secondly, not valuing the multicultural diversity of the game. And now the penny has dropped on both of these things and they’re doing this. It’s absolutely great to see.

Murray knows firsthand how football can help unite and build a community. He arrived in Australia with his family in 1957 as refugees fleeing the communist government of Hungary. Living in housing commission in the south coast suburb of Berkley, in Murray’s autobiography *By the Balls: A memoir of a football tragic*, he explains how his father set up a club for Hungarian migrants of Wollongong called Pannonia. It was a ‘kind of refuge for young Magyar migrants of the area, a healthy weekend outlet – especially for single men,’ writes Murray. As a 16-year-old, Murray played for Pannonia and remembers this impact it had on the community, even though the club only lasted a couple of years.

The community was galvanised. There was a sense of unity among the local Magyars, a new purpose to living life away from the long night shifts at the steelworks. We played and won games. Hundreds gathered around the suburban grounds, cheering and shouting.

Whilst the likes of Murray's employer, SBS, and football's governing body celebrate the 'multicultural diversity of the game', what is left untold is the struggle for new migrants to integrate into its organised competitions. It is particularly ironic to think of this scenario considering that in the late 1950s, post-World War II migrants successfully initiated to take control of the game away from Anglo-Australian administrators.

As Dr Phillip Mosely states in *Ethnic Involvement in Australian Soccer: A History 1950-1990*, "ethnicity" today is not the same as it was yesterday, nor will it be the same tomorrow.' The migrants of today come from Africa, Asia and the Middle East – nearly all from football nations – but drive around the fields on the weekend, and they are under-represented within FFA affiliated competitions. In his book *Don't go back to where you came from: Why multiculturalism works*, Tim Soutphommasane writes: 'too often we are guilty of our complacency.'

As a football community we have come complacent in accepting the migrant narrative developed from the 1950s. This narrative has blinded us from the reality that football has created barriers to entry for newly arrived migrants. Football in Australia was built on the back of migrants but now celebrates its diversity at the superficial level.

It is not as if these new migrants aren't playing football. But many of them play outside the FFA's structure. They have created multiple competitions that are running parallel to the institution.

The Great Western Highway runs through Parramatta along the top of what the locals call Mays Hill. At the base of the hill on the northern side is Parramatta Park. In the summer months the Western Sydney Wanderers play here at Parramatta Stadium. On the southern side of the hill is a series of sporting fields used for multiple sports such as football, cricket and local inter public school competitions. Over the last few years, a group of young Ugandan males play a pick-up game of football here

using bags or jackets as goals. Over the years the equipment has improved: marker domes now outline the field, teams are now easily identifiable thanks to bibs and goals have replaced the player's personal belongings.

Travel west along the Great Western Highway to Blacktown and what started as a pick-up game amongst South Sudanese has turned into fully-fledged association of some 300 participants thanks to the support of the Wanderers. It is all part of the club's community engagement strategy which has been developed by cultural engagement specialists Red Elephant Projects.

'Our aim is to support them over the two, three years, to a level where they no longer need our support,' said Tim Thorne, former Western Sydney Wanderers community, pathways and football development manager. 'Part of this campaign is to say we believe in the community. We want to help and work with the community and believe that you guys can get it to a level that you run it yourselves. We believe that is very important for the community work that we do.'

'Each year we give them a mountain of balls. I put them through a referee's course to decrease the cost for their tournaments so they don't have to pay somebody, that they can use somebody from the community. I've given all of the coaches grassroots licences. Twenty-five of them through the grassroots coaching [community course].'

The Wanderers have worked with the state and local government to obtain funds and obtain free access to fields. The Police Citizens Youth Club (PCYC) and Catholic Care have been brought in to help the youth understand their roles within the community and also to provide mentorship programs. It is a holistic approach that helps the South Sudanese navigate their way into Australian life.

'On top of that we have the business education so that they can learn how to run the association. That they run it in a way in which they can contact sponsors or funders. So they eventually don't need someone and they're self sufficient,' explains Thorne. A local club has been engaged so that players have the opportunity,

if they so choose, to play in the local Blacktown District Soccer Football Association.

This process of helping newly arrived migrant communities set up their own associations, tournaments and competitions is one that Red Elephant Projects has refined. One of the organisation's first football projects was to set up the Australian Somali Football Association in Melbourne.

'I'd been approached and working with Moonee Valley Council about doing some multicultural sports advising and they said "look, we've got a young leadership group working with Somali kids in the Flemington/North Melbourne areas. What we want to do? We want to run a football tournament",' said Red Elephant Project's Patrick Skene. 'So they brought me in to run and mentor them for three years to get up going strong and sustainable.'

Over the Christmas period in 2014, the association held its fifth national football championship. It has expanded over the years from eight teams to seventeen and includes Horn of African Australian communities: Somalia, South Sudan, Eritrea, Ethiopia and Kenya. 'The tournaments is where they play for where they live. Which is a good civic pride developer,' said Skene.

The tournament, which runs at an estimated cost of \$40,000 to \$50,000, is self-sufficient. Red Elephant Projects helps these newly formed associations source funding and teaches them how to obtain it themselves. 'We have fundraising expertise. We know there is a combination of local businesses, grants, corporates and sometimes wealthy individuals who are interested in seeing these communities going forward,' said Skene. 'Your local councils, your Rotary's, there's always funding there. People just need to be brought into the story.'

The work of the Western Sydney Wanderers and Red Elephant Projects is admirable, although it must be noted they are not purely altruistic – both are seeking to make a profit. The Wanderers are

taking a long-term view of increasing their supporter base. Red Elephant Projects is making its money by consulting to sporting federations, professional clubs and corporates on how to engage with cultural communities. This is not to say what Wanderers and Red Elephant Projects are doing is wrong – they are merely supplying a service which has been caused by a failure of the system. A failure that is not caused entirely by FFA and its member federations, but one it has struggled to address.

So the question is why are these new migrant communities playing outside the FFA's structures? Football United's founder Anne Bunde-Birouste co-authored a research paper *Moving beyond the 'Lump-Sum': Football United and JP Morgan as a Case Study of Partnership for Social Change*. She found that participation 'is either limited or not possible for many socio-disadvantaged youth due to a myriad of barriers such as financial, transport and logistical constraints.'

Football United provides free training and playing opportunities to over 1000 children and youth per week predominately in Western Sydney. Bunde-Birouste stated that the organisation chose football because 'it is relatively inexpensive, it enjoys worldwide enthusiasm, it is designed as a non-violent, virtually non-contact sport and it is played by both genders.' The logic behind Football United's decision to select football for this reason makes sense; the problem is that the sport is out of reach for many, something those within the organisation acknowledge.

'For the parents, they've got to work and they've got to pay rent. So to even have their kids play at the local club is really challenging,' said Stuart Meney, head coach and communications manager for Football United. 'But there are some who eventually find their way to play for the local club on the weekend.' Football United's research paper *Playing for Change: Improving people's lives through football* identified that gaps of participation in sport can contribute to 'general dissatisfaction within society,' including 'leaving school, aggressive behaviour and unemployment'.

Leopold Method examined the cost of playing for an Under 9s player in Sydney at the start of 2013 season. The cost of playing – ranging from \$80 to \$325 – has not reduced since, and if anything it is has increased. Why such a variance in price? The cost of hiring grounds, the incorporation of referees fees, some clubs charge to purchase playing apparel and the size of the club are all listed as reasons on FFA’s ‘My Football Club’ website.

This does not explain, however, all of the costs associated with playing. In NSW, there are three governing bodies that collect fees or capitation before the club’s even determine what fees to set: FFA, Football NSW and the respective local associations where the club resides.

‘Cost is a big one,’ said Skene. ‘If you’re on the bottom rung of Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs and you’ve got a family...firstly it’s the rego fees. It’s a \$1,000 to \$1,500 a year investment if you put in transport and goodies that go on top of it. It’s just too much. It’s just monstrous.’

Ground hire charges vary from council to council. Generally this is one of the largest expenses for a club, and is one of the main reasons for the large variability of fees. For new migrant communities trying to start their own competition or tournament, cost is not the only barrier – obtaining access to fields is also an issue. ‘They’re [migrant clubs and associations] second tier. So when it comes to ground allocation, they’re second tier to mainstream clubs,’ said Skene. ‘That’s why we have councils as partners in any program. That becomes a fundamental part of it. Sometimes they get them for free. Sometimes they get them for a reduced cost. It just depends how culturally competent the council is. Whether they have disadvantaged community programs.’

The other silent barrier is access to transport to training and games. ‘Transport is a monster. If you’re playing in a regional competition,

if you haven't got a car, it's embarrassing,' said Skene. 'A lot of migrants have to work. You know, twice a week training, that's twice a week you're going to get embarrassed for not having a car. If you think twice about the way men think. It's a huge factor. Plus if it's the single mum; how is she going to get there?'

Meney supports Skene's assessment: 'That was one of the big issues. The kids wanted to engage and play, but then both parents are working. For some, they are unsure or uncertain of the region. So for some travelling around is a challenge.'

When Football United started its after-school program in Auburn, in Sydney's western suburbs, the first location did not draw the number of participants they were expecting. The reason was that the location was not really suitable to where the children were living and going to school. Six weeks later, they went back with the same number of coaches to a location close to the primary school. Over 100 kids showed up.

'They were full on playing,' said Meney. 'Their parents were standing around the outside. There were eight to 10 sessions happening at the same time. About 30 kids to each coach. Maybe I took 50 on my own.'

One of the fond memories for Meney from the Auburn clinics was that children of all backgrounds participated. Young girls in Afghan dresses were kicking a football around. Football United also offers girls only programs to overcome some of the cultural sensitivities of females playing sport. The organisation commissioned a study *Playing for Change: Improving people's lives through football* which identified that barriers were most apparent for girls, particularly those who came from backgrounds where they were expected to carry out domestic work.

A challenge of participating in football due to a patriarchal household is one issue; trying to play sport and follow strict religious customs is another. Catherine Palmer spent a few years observing and conducting interviews with young Muslim women

from the public housing estate, The Parks, in South Australia. An impoverished urban area, had been given over to accommodate newly arrived refugees from Somalia, Ethiopia, Uganda and Sudan.

These young women wanted to participate in a sport that they had seen their brothers and male relatives play, both in their country of origin and upon re-settlement in Australia. Along with the support of the local health service, these young women set up a team to compete in the Refugee Week football carnival. Palmer's research *Soccer and the politics of identity for young Muslim refugee women in South Australia* observed that there was great diversity in how these young Muslim women interpreted Islam in trying to dress accordingly for training and games,

Some of the team elected to wear the shorts and short-sleeved tops of the customary soccer strip, while others chose to wear long sleeved T-shirts and tracksuit pants under their uniform. Some young women wore a bandana in place of their hijab (which covers the hair and neck areas). Others wore the krimar (which covers the hair and front of the body) during training and competition, while a small number wore the niqab (face veil, often worn with the krimar), removed it when in the female-only training environment. Still others elected to play entirely bare headed.

These issues were generally easy to manage in a female-only training environment, but problems arose once the Refugee Week carnival commenced. Some parents were happy for their daughters to be training in a female only environment, but were none to happy, actually reluctant, to let them compete in a competition where there were male observers.

As both Football United and Palmer's research has identified, there are many willing female participants, but football's existing competition structures does not meet most of the cultural requirements of these communities.

A child who arrives to a strange land can face greater difficulties in trying to adapt and transition into society. As Bunde-Birouste explains, children who have fled their homeland or have been displaced are at greater risk of ‘psychological problems’ which can impact their ‘physical’ and ‘educational development. A child who has physically lost, or lost communication with, family and friends, now has to form new social networks. This is difficult when confronted with trying to learn a new language and adapt to cultural differences.

Football United tries to break down these barriers through the common language of football. ‘It doesn’t matter if it is a guy or a girl or whoever scores a goal. They just want to win. We scored a goal together,’ said Meney. The *Playing for Change* report found that Football United participants wanted to ‘get to know people from other ethnic groups’, while children in schools without the program preferred to keep within their own ‘cultural and language groups’.

‘There’s a lot of preconceived ideas about some people from certain places,’ said Meney. ‘Even if we are able to light that spark, to make them think “it’s pretty cool. They passed it to me and I scored a goal.”’

Having fun and using football to break down barriers is part of the process, but the aim of Football United’s programs is to help build confidence in children and help teach them valuable life lessons.

‘If you have a couple of kids who do well, what does this mean? It means you have the skill and people recognise that,’ said Meney. Competence builds confidence and this perpetuates into the child’s education. Football United participants had better retention levels in learning than those who were not part of the program: which lead to improved English proficiency and easy transition into high school. A confident child, with improved mastery of the English language, starts to communicate more with their peers. Here

Football United uses football to help with this learning process.

‘To be able to play with your teammates, you have to be able to communicate well,’ said Meney. ‘Can you communicate with the referee? Can you communicate with teammates? Or authority figures? Your family? Can you get your point across?’

Meney’s favourite story is of a teenager from an African background who simply wouldn’t speak. ‘You would ask him a question; he wouldn’t speak,’ said Meney. ‘He was so, so quiet.’ The coaches could tell straight away that the child loved playing football, so Meney got him to help with some simple tasks such as putting out marker cones for training drills, then progressed to getting the teenager to become his assistant coach.

Football United helped him with the junior coaching licence and he is now one of their coaches helping to run primary school gala days. On tour in Brazil, this once quiet teenager (who by this time had completed his High School Certificate) was asked to do a cultural presentation in front of over 300 people. ‘He grabbed the microphone and lead the “Aussie, Aussie, Aussie” chant. It’s incredible,’ said Meney.

Back in the days of the National Soccer League, Marconi Stadium was a palace of football. But time has not been good for the one-time powerhouse of Australian football. In the decade or so that has passed since the closure of the NSL, Marconi were sent to play in the state leagues, and the licensed club (which financially supports the football operations) was hit with financial problems. In the ensuing years, Marconi has gone from winning national titles to fighting a relegation battle in the NSW National Premier Leagues.

Walk into the stadium and you notice that the weather worn sign on the gates has never been restored. All that remains of the eastern terraces are mounds of dirt after it was pulled down after they were condemned for not having the required structural footings to support it. The club’s sky blue colours that adorn the

awnings is faded and the seats are now fading to chalky white.

December 20, 2014 wasn't a game between Marconi and 'some other' ex-NSL club. The ground hosted the final of the Western Sydney Wanderers Asian Cup between Australian based migrants from Iraq and Bahrain. It was a surreal experience inside the Italian sporting club: older men chatted amongst themselves in Arabic, the children waved miniature Iraqi flags and the young men clapped to the beat of the drum. On the field, young Iraqi men – Assyrian Christians, Shiites and Sunnis – proudly wear their national team colours. Strangely, the Bahraini's wore Borussia Dortmund's away kit. I was informed that the Bahraini team is three-quarters Iraqi who used the 'grandfather card' as means of representing the tiny island nation.

The sweet onion smell of Marconi's famous steak rolls permeated the air and brought back a wave of nostalgia. But modern football has intruded even here. Wanderers banners were dotted around the perimeter of the pitch, while the club's volunteer Wandercrew entertained kids and managed match day logistics. An old migrant soccer club hosted a new migrant football tournament run by a new A-League club.

Present at the game were Wanderers man Tim Thorne and Red Elephant Projects' Patrick Skene. Both men are there to make sure the event runs smoothly. When Western Sydney Wanderers were formed in 2012, many argued that the club should reach out to the 'traditional clubs' or the old NSL and state league clubs.

'We've been engaging with everybody,' said Thorne. 'We have a policy of not [targeting] certain cultures. We want to respect all of the cultures. You need to understand that in 20 years, is not to think about today, but the future. Believe in the cultures that have made Western Sydney fantastic, but also in the cultures that are going to make it fantastic in the future.'

Red Elephant Projects is using a 'new approach' to tried-and-tested models of how newly arrivals integrate into Australian

society. This model can be best explained by Richard Cashman's *Paradise of Sport: The Rise of Organised Sport in Australia*.

Sport played a crucial role in community formation because it provided a largely accepted way for immigrant communities to organise themselves. It represented in which one immigrant community could relate to another and it was also a bridge between such a community and the wider Australian society through sport.

Cashman further explains this by citing football historian Roy Hay's theory that ethnic based football clubs provided 'integrative services' such as accommodation, jobs and networks. Murray expands on this through his own personal experiences in *The World Game: The story of how football went global*,

By nature immigrants, at least in the immediate period after their arrival, need to be with each other in order to soften the difficulties and hostilities of migration. In order to survive they need to associate with people who speak their language, follow their customs, and trade in things they need.

The counter argument to ethnic clubs is that it promotes separatism. 'That's the thing,' said Skene. 'It's still very heavily Anglo in the establishment. And that race based segmenting is the worst thing. Instead of going "shit look a 20 team Nepealese League. What a fantastic opportunity!" But as Mosely argues these ethnic clubs participating in competitions helps 'break down barriers' by having to be part of the administration process such as developing codes of conduct, payment of fees, refereeing and disciplinary committees and creating competitions draws.

'The dual identity process: that does not immediately become an identity when you arrive in Australia, it has to be developed over time,' said Skene as we watched the first half of the final. Just as Football United work on building the confidence of migrant and

refugee children through football, Red Elephant Projects works with migrant communities to build their own identity through sport and cultural programs. 'The more confident you are with your own identity, when you look at these groups, they're all fantastic examples of the dual identity. They provide great role models 'hey you can be an Aussie Somali. You can live both worlds.'

Red Elephant Projects' strategy is to target community leaders, who are highly influential. 'Their leaders are generally widely admired, they deal with mainstream and their own communities and set the example for their community to follow,' explained Skene.

Saadi Toma, a former Iraq Olympic coach who gained political asylum with Sydney FC's Ali Abbas in 2007 personifies this influence. 'I love Australia and I want to contribute something to Australia,' said Toma through the assistance of an interpreter. 'As a community ambassador, I'm telling my community this country gave us a lot and we have a lot to give them back.'

We discussed the concept of dual identity and what it means to be an Iraqi living in Australia. 'I have to be proud of who I am. Of my ancestors, where I grew up and where I made my name,' said Toma, who is affectionately known as 'The Captain'. Toma's statement reflects the same quote expressed by another migrant in *Paradise of Sport*: 'My Soul to God. My Life to Australia. My Heart to Hungary.'

Proud to be Iraqi. Proud to be Australian. As the final whistle sounded, the victorious Iraqi team and crowd celebrated their nation's triumph. This may not have been the Asian Cup proper, but that does not diminish how proud the Iraqis are of their achievements. 'There's Assyrian Christians here. There's Muslims in this team. We're here representing Iraq. There's no different ethnic or races here,' said Gath Muhana, who served as a media manager for the Iraq national team at the AFC Asian Cup and is a representative of Iraq Football Association in Australia. Back in his homeland the country is being ripped apart by a religious and sectarian civil war.

As surreal as the experience was, it can still provide some valuable lessons on how the national and state football administrators can tackle a modern day problem. The Marconi club was built by the Italian community of Western Sydney as a place to socialise, to network, find employment and business contacts, and even find a future husband or wife. Most importantly, the club helped Italians to transition into the Australian way of life.

Their football team became a powerhouse of Australian football during the 1980s and 1990s – the pride of the Western Sydney Italian community – and developed a pipeline of talent for the national teams. Today Marconi is no longer the club it once was. Walking through the club there are more Asians playing the poker machines than Italians in the dining halls. As Murray said ‘their fans assimilated and had no need for these weekend rituals.’ Many Italians no longer need the club.

But outside on the field, the new migrants from the Middle East were dreaming of replicating what Marconi achieved. ‘I prefer they [Iraqi’s] have their own club. This will be their history. They will create something for themselves – Iraqis in Australia producing talent,’ said Toma. Muhana agreed that the community can play a part in developing players: ‘Yeah, why not? If these players today show – and they’re playing in the [NSW National] Premier League – maybe they’ve got a good future.’

Organisations like Football United, Red Elephant Projects and Western Sydney Wanderers provide some solutions for football administrators on how to reach out to the new migrant and refugee community and make them a part of the football family.

‘Football is still incredibly inflexible because of the success of grassroots football,’ said Skene. But while football celebrates its strength in diversity and growth in playing numbers, the idea of a ‘fair go and egalitarianism’ is not extended to the all new migrants and refugees. ‘The whole ecosystem has to align for it to work,’ said Skene.

Football showing empathy to these new communities at an administrative level. We must understand their specific and

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complex needs, and provide practical support. Thorne, who has done some of the important legwork at the Wanderers, gives a simple guiding principle for the game's administrators through his own personal experience.

‘We go and support football as much as we can from elite to grassroots level. But with the emerging cultures we need to reach out a bit more to help them understand that we’re there for them.’

CONTRIBUTORS

SHAUN MOONEY – PUBLISHER

Shaun is the publisher of *Leopold Method*, and has contributed to *Guardian Australia*. He writes features on the business of football, grassroots issues and player development. He interprets the ‘cause and effects’ to provide an alternative approach to the discourse. Previously, Shaun wrote articles for retail and small business marketing, which were syndicated across six countries. He has also co-authored two business books, and along with his fellow author was described by *Australian Financial Review* as ‘marketing gurus’.

JOE GORMAN – EDITOR

Joe is the editor of *Leopold Method*. He has written about soccer, food and culture for *Guardian Australia*, the *Sydney Morning Herald*, *Sports Illustrated*, SBS, *Penthouse Australia*, *Roads and Kingdoms*, *New Matilda* and *Overland*.

KATE COHEN

Kate is a freelance football writer who writes for *Leopold Method*. Whereas football writing commonly tells the reader the ‘who’, ‘what’ and ‘when’ of a match, Kate endeavours to explain to the reader the ‘why’ and the ‘how’. Since writing for *Leopold Method*,

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she has quickly become one of the best young football writers in the country, winning the FFDU Young Football Writer of the Year in 2013. Her work has also featured in *Guardian Australia*, the official Liverpool FC website, as well as *FourFourTwo Australia*. In 2014, Kate was awarded Digital Football Writer of the Year in the FFDU Awards.

SCOTT MCINTYRE

Scott is a football reporter for SBS and Australia's pre-eminent Asian football expert. He has covered three World Cups and five Asian Cups.

RICHARD PARKIN

Richard is a Sydney-based football journalist. He was the football analyst and co-host of SBS's World Cup show *The Full Brazilian*. Richard is a regular A-League columnist for *Guardian Australia*, he hosted the 2010 World Cup for SBS Radio, and has reported on world football for the past four years for SBS World News.

KIERAN PENDER

Kieran is a Canberra-based sports writer, contributing to *Guardian Australia*, *Leopold Method*, *FourFourTwo Australia*, *RIDE* and a variety of other publications. He covers football, basketball and cycling.

VINCE RUGARI

Vince is a writer for *Leopold Method*. Currently a sports reporter for Australian Associated Press in Brisbane, he is the former sports editor of *The Area News* in Griffith, NSW, one of Australian football's most passionate regional outposts, and is a former journalist for *The Cairns Post*. A regular columnist for *The Roar*, he has also been

published by *Guardian Australia*, *The World Game*, *Goal Australia* and more. The round ball game has always been Vince's master, but these days, his curiosity extends beyond the mainstream, in the areas where it is yet to take complete hold.

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— RALE RASIC ON LEOPOLD BAUMGARTNER

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